JUNE 2021

CONSENSUS STATEMENT

COVID-19 VACCINATION

EFFECT ON MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS AGED 12 TO 15 YEARS OLD

SECTION OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRISTS
COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

ACADEMY OF MEDICINE SINGAPORE

SECTION OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRISTS
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BACKGROUND / KEY POINTS

The psychological and social impact of COVID-19 on children and teenagers has been studied locally as well as abroad. Increases in emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression have been reported (Meherali et al., Mar 2021; Chia, Chang & Roy, Dec 2020) These are likely to be caused by limited access to basic services such as healthcare and social services, and social isolation due to disruption of school, sports, and social group gatherings. There are also reports of increased rates of suicidal ideation and attempts among adolescents during the pandemic (Hill et al., Mar 2021; Hao et al., Jul 2020).

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on 11 May 2021 has expanded the emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for the prevention of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) to include teenagers 12 to 15 years of age. Similarly, the Health Sciences Authority extended authorisation under the Pandemic Special Access Route (PSAR) to include this age-group.

GUIDELINES

With the recent COVID-19 surge in Singapore and the larger number of young persons being affected, the extension of the authorisation for the Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine to include adolescents 12 to 15 years of age is seen as a significant step in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Backed by positive clinical trial results, inclusion of younger people into Singapore's vaccination schedule will allow additional protection for this vulnerable group of population and bring the country closer towards herd immunity.

The effectiveness data from Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine study showed that the immune response to the vaccine in adolescents aged 12 – 15 years was comparable to older participants. In an analysis of cases of COVID-19 occurring among vaccine trial participants, no cases of COVID-19 occurred among 1,005 vaccine recipients while 16 cases of COVID-19 occurred among 978 placebo (non-vaccinated) recipients, thus suggesting that the vaccine was 100% effective in preventing COVID-19.

Out of 2260 participants aged 12 to 15 years old, there were four participants with pre-existing anxiety and depression who experienced an exacerbation (worsening) of their mental health condition. Between the time of the first vaccine dose to one month after the second dose, 3 participants reported worsening of their depression symptoms. However, this exacerbation coincided with starting the use of SSRI antidepressant medications within the past one to two months. SSRI antidepressants themselves pose a recognised risk for exacerbation in patients who are new to this group of medications. At about one month after the second vaccine dose, another participant reported worsening of depressive symptoms but this could have been due to the participant's concurrent psychosocial issues. Hence, participant numbers with depressive symptom exacerbation were very small (0.17%) and no definite cause and effect relationship

between the vaccine and exacerbation of symptoms of depression could be drawn. (FDA decision memo)

Please discuss with your doctor or psychiatrist if you have any concern about your child receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

To date, more than half a million youths in the United States have received the vaccine (Reuters, May 2021). Most side effects were mild, manageable and do not differ very much from other forms of vaccines. Having a vaccine authorized for a younger population is a critical step in lessening the immense public health burden caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We will continue to closely monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in all age groups of the population in relation to mental health conditions, and will rigorously review all new data emerging from the clinical trials and real-world experiences.

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