

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri



Abstract

**BIOETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19 VACCINES IN
CHILDREN AGED 5-11 YEARS**

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The ICB, after various documents on the pandemic, considered it important to intervene on the recently authorised paediatric vaccination for children 5-11 years of age. As part of an in-depth study of the medical aspects, relative to the epidemiological data on the development of the disease and the data on the safety and efficacy of vaccinations at international and national level for the 5–11-year-old-group, the ICB highlights the favourable relationship of benefits compared to risks.

In particular, the Committee stresses that, given the risks posed by the disease and the possible consequences, vaccinating children is primarily aimed at protecting their health, for direct benefits, considering both physical health (the prevention of serious illness and death from Covid-19) and well-being on the psycho-social level (the possibility of safely continuing schooling and socialisation).

In addition to the direct benefits there are indirect benefits that must be added, the protection of the members of the family with whom the children live, especially in the case of the elderly and vulnerable people who cannot be vaccinated as well as limiting the "circulation" of the virus and achieving community immunity more rapidly.

The Committee considers it important to explain to children, even using age-appropriate resources (including comics, cartoons, and television characters), the need for attentive and preventive health behaviours through vaccinations. Stressing the importance of setting up specific vaccination sites for children with attractive games and graphics, bearing in mind that interesting initiatives have also been taken in schools, which can be the preferred location to vaccinate children, given that school is the most familiar place after home to a child and this can *make the child feel safe, protected, and live this experience as if it were part of their routine*.

Finally, the Committee stresses the importance of informed consent in which the wishes of parents are expressed. Informed consent in paediatrics for young children, for vaccination choices, is left to the competent reflection of the physician regarding assessment of the child's health conditions and provision of complete and clear information to parents in the context of the therapeutic alliance. In this phase, paediatricians are therefore responsible for extensive work on information and persuasion, as well as monitoring the progress of vaccinations in 'real life', throughout the territory and in hospitals.

The Committee recommends that parents take decisions considering the best interests of the minor and the protection of their frail family members, as well as protection of the community; it urges institutional communication, scientific associations and societies and the paediatricians themselves to continue to provide clear and transparent information on the balance of the benefits and risks of the vaccine; it calls for the careful monitoring of *fake news*; it hopes for the organization of vaccination campaigns in schools.