

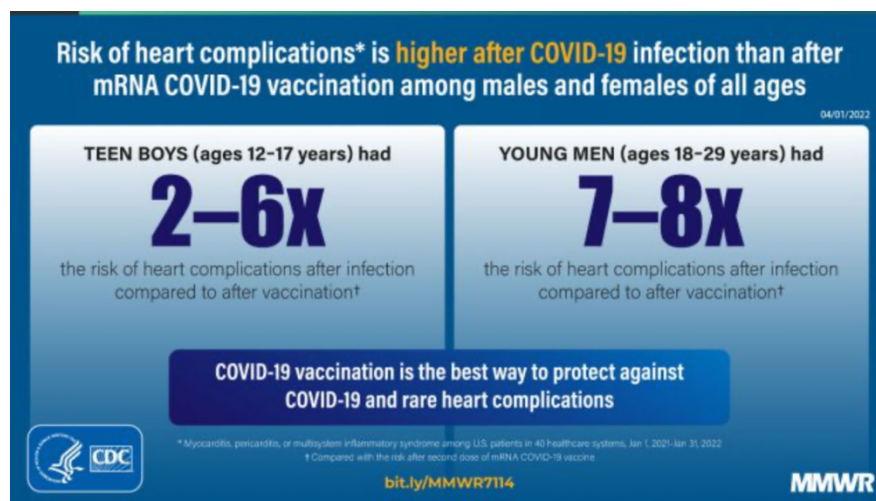
# Whopper of the Week: RFK Jr. Frightens Parents with False Claims about COVID Vaccine Dangers

## IN SUMMARY:

COVID-19 vaccines are safe for children. But Secretary Kennedy has repeatedly claimed that the vaccines are deadly and should not be given to kids because of their “[profound risks](#).” Kennedy wildly exaggerates the frequency and severity of adverse reactions associated with COVID vaccines. He has tried and failed to find any verified pediatric deaths due to the vaccines. Kennedy wants to sow doubt about pediatric COVID-19 vaccines to justify policies that would severely limit the ability of parents to vaccinate their children.

## WHY IS THIS A WHOPPER?

RFK Jr. has said that COVID-19 vaccines “have [huge associations](#) with myocarditis, pericarditis, strokes and neurological conditions.” None of this is true. Myocarditis is a [rare](#) adverse effect post covid vaccination, which is more common in boys aged 12-17 after their second shot. But myocarditis from a COVID-19 infection occurred at a rate as high as [450 per million](#) in young males. Teen boys infected with the virus were up to 6 times more likely to develop myocarditis as those who have received the vaccine. According to [Dr. Charlotte Moser](#), co-director of the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia’s Vaccine Education Center, “no children have died from vaccine-related myocarditis, but some have died from infection-related myocarditis. So, opting out of vaccination because of concerns about myocarditis does not remove the risk.”

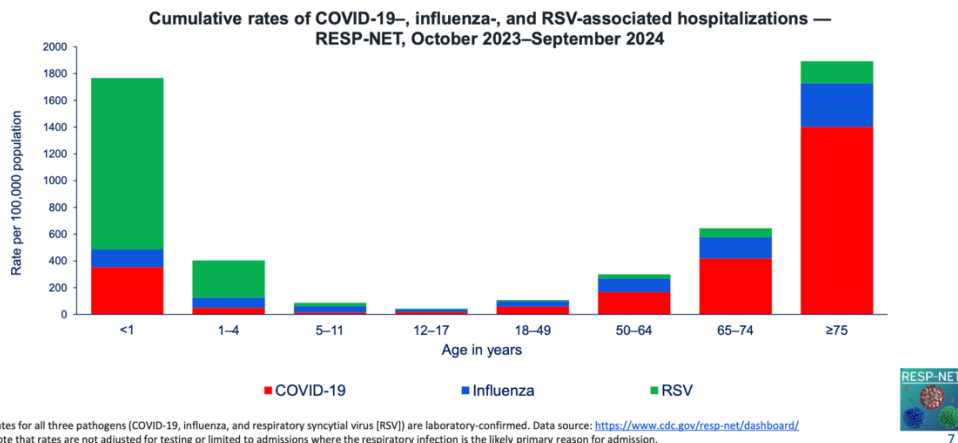


There is no data showing that COVID-19 vaccines cause stroke and neurological conditions in children. Nor has Secretary Kennedy provided [any evidence](#) for his claims that the COVID vaccine led to pediatric deaths. The administration said it would soon share data about vaccine mortality, and the [New York Times](#) reported a report might be presented at the September ACIP.

It was not. Nevertheless, Kennedy continues to misrepresent data from old clinical trials to falsely [imply](#) that there have been pediatric deaths linked to vaccination. As Defend Public Health reported last month, numerous high quality studies have been done and ongoing vaccine safety monitoring systems continue to show that there is no link between COVID19 vaccines and pediatric deaths.

RFK Jr. said healthy children are at “[zero risk from COVID.](#)” Close to [1,500 American children](#) died of COVID-19 in the first three years of the pandemic, making COVID-19 the eighth leading pediatric cause of death in that period. Many more [children died](#) of COVID-19 than the flu between [2020-2023](#). Even today, COVID-19 can be a serious illness for infants and toddlers. Children aged 6-23 months are hospitalized at the same rate as adults aged 50-64 years while infants less than 6 months old are hospitalized at the same rate as 65-74 year olds. These are avoidable hospitalizations; only 5% of hospitalized children in Oct 2023-March 2024 were vaccinated against COVID-19. Children under two years are especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

## Rates of respiratory virus-associated hospitalizations vary by age group and pathogen.



Vaccination also prevents long term complications associated with COVID-19. A recent study of [400,000 children](#) found that repeat COVID-19 infections increase the risks of long COVID, myocarditis, blood clots and other health problems such as kidney disease, headaches, fatigue, abnormal heart rhythms and abdominal pains. There are now more children in the US diagnosed with [long COVID](#) than there are with asthma. If Secretary Kennedy were serious about preventing chronic illness in children, he would recommend immunization.

### WHY IT MATTERS:

Secretary Kennedy has instituted a number of policy changes that reduce access to COVID-19 vaccines for children. In May 2025, Kennedy unilaterally announced that COVID-19 vaccines will no longer be on the CDC’s recommended vaccine schedule for pregnant women and healthy children; a [decision](#) taken without input from CDC staff or outside expert advisors. In June, Kennedy announced [new vaccines](#), especially those for under 65 years old, must be tested against placebos. This is going to make it harder and more expensive for pharmaceutical companies to bring updated vaccines to market. It is also unethical to withhold protection from clinical trial participants if there is already a safe product that works. What the FDA is proposing

would deny some trial participants access to a vaccine that we know could help them stay healthy and alive. That is why the FDA normally asks pharmaceutical companies to compare new vaccines to old ones, in order to establish whether the new one actually works better. Nevertheless, in August, against the advice of agency scientists, the [FDA](#) eliminated emergency use authorizations for COVID-19 boosters, leaving only one approved vaccine for children under five years.

The virus that causes COVID-19 continues to circulate globally. Even [President Trump](#) got his updated COVID-19 booster and flu shot this week. Parents should have the freedom to choose to immunize their children too. Secretary Kennedy is taking that choice away and scaring parents to justify his decisions.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [Infectious Disease Society of America](#) and the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#) continue to recommend the covid vaccine in children 6 months and older. Secretary Kennedy's constant misinformation reduces parental trust in the vaccines. If fewer children are vaccinated against COVID, more children will be susceptible to COVID-19 and some will develop severe cases or chronic conditions. American kids deserve better.

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