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World

Florida breaks with CDC, recommends no COVID vaccine for healthy children



Reuters
Dan Whitcomb

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Sara Kalinicos, from Peru, gets a Pfizer-BioNtech COVID-19 vaccination from a health-care worker at Miami International Airport on May 10, 2021 in Miami, Fla. PHOTO BY JOE RAEDLE /Getty Images

Florida's top health official said on Monday the state would recommend against the COVID-19 vaccine for healthy children, breaking with guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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In announcing the move during press briefing convened by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, the state's surgeon general Dr. Joseph Lapado cited studies that showed few COVID fatalities among healthy children and elevated risk among young boys receiving the vaccine of side effects such as myocarditis.

"The Florida Department of Health is going to be first state to officially recommend against the use of COVID 19 vaccines for healthy children," Lapado said during the more than 90-minute panel discussion.

Last week, a study based on New York state health records suggested that the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was less effective at preventing infection in children aged 5 to 11 than in older kids but still cut hospitalizations by about 50%.

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A U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report released in January found that the vaccine was 91% effective in preventing rare but often serious conditions in children that causes organ inflammation weeks after COVID-19 infections called Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children in 12-18 year olds.

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The CDC has strongly recommended that parents have children over the age of 5 inoculated, despite a sharp decline in infections and hospitalizations nationwide since a winter peak in January and evidence that it has been less effective against the Omicron variant.

“It’s deeply disturbing that there are politicians peddling conspiracy theories out there and casting doubt on vaccinations when is our best tool against the virus and the best tool to prevent even teenagers from being hospitalized,” White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in response to Lapado’s comments.

DeSantis, a Republican often named as a potential 2024 presidential candidate, has often sparred with Biden, a Democrat, over COVID mandates and restrictions.

The CDC referred Reuters to their existing recommendation.