

# WHO: Vaccinating kids 'not a high priority' amid shortage

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In this Wednesday, May 19, 2021 file photo, Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine doses are prepared for members of the community 12 years and up, at a clinic held by Community of Hope, outside the Washington School for Girls in southeast Washington. The World Health Organization's top vaccines expert says that immunizing children against the coronavirus "is not a high priority" given the extremely limited global supply of doses. During a social media session on Thursday, June 3 Dr. Kate O'Brien said that vaccinating children "is not a priority from a WHO perspective," even as increasing numbers of rich countries authorize their COVID-19 shots for teenagers and children. Credit: AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin, file

The World Health Organization's top vaccines expert said Thursday that immunizing children against COVID-19 is not a high priority from a WHO perspective, given the extremely limited global supply of doses.

During a social media session, Dr. Kate O'Brien said [children](#) should not be a focus of COVID-19 immunization programs even as increasing numbers of rich countries authorize their coronavirus shots for teenagers and children.

"Children are at (a) very, very low risk of actually

getting COVID disease," said O'Brien, a pediatrician and director of the WHO's vaccines department. She said that the rationale for immunizing children was to stop transmission rather than to protect them from getting sick or dying.

"When we're in this really difficult place, as we are right now, where the supply of vaccine is insufficient for everybody around the world, immunizing kids is not a high priority right now."

O'Brien said it was critical to ensure [health workers](#) and the elderly, or those with underlying conditions, were inoculated ahead of teenagers and children.

Canada, the U.S. and the European Union have all recently given the green light to some COVID-19 vaccines for children aged 12 to 15 as they approach their vaccination targets for adults.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has urged [rich countries](#) to donate shots to poor countries rather than immunize their adolescents and children. Fewer than 1% of COVID-19 vaccines administered globally have been used in [poor countries](#).

O'Brien said it might be appropriate to immunize children against the coronavirus "in due course, when the supply increases much more substantially." She added that it wasn't necessary to vaccinate children before sending them back to school, as long as the adults in contact with them were immunized.

"Immunization of children in order to send them back to school is not the predominant requirement for them to go back to school safely," she said. "They can go back to school safely if what we're doing is immunizing those who are around them who are at risk."

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