

Vanderbilt Child Health Poll: A little over half of Tennessee parents say they have or plan to vaccinate their children against COVID-19

A poll of roughly 1,000 Tennessee parents in the fall of 2021 found that 46% of parents with children age 12-17 reported the child had been vaccinated for COVID-19, and another 14% said they were likely to get their child vaccinated in the next few months.

The latest analysis of the annual Vanderbilt Child Health Poll conducted by the Vanderbilt Center for Child Health Policy explores attitudes and behaviors among Tennessee parents regarding the COVID-19 vaccine and children. The poll was conducted prior to vaccines being widely available for children age 5-12 and prior to the arrival of the omicron variant surge in Tennessee in December.

“In the months since the poll and with omicron tearing through the state, we’ve seen an anecdotal uptick in interest from parents for COVID-19 vaccine for their children,” said Joe Zickafoose, MD, MS, assistant professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt and member in the Center. “It remains to be seen whether that translates into a meaningful increase in vaccinated children in Tennessee.”

Among parents of kids age 12-17, more Black, non-Hispanic parents reported their children had been vaccinated (66%) compared to White, non-Hispanic parents (41%) or parents from other groups (46%). Although the survey had smaller numbers for these very specific groups, the large gaps suggest the differences could be real. Currently, there are no state data to assess whether those differences have continued since the fall.

Regionally, there was a large difference across the Grand Divisions of the state in parents who reported their children 12-17 had been vaccinated. In West Tennessee, more than 60% of parents reported their kids 12-17 have been vaccinated, compared to just 34% in East Tennessee. Parents reported just over 51% of kids 12-17 in Middle Tennessee had been vaccinated.

Among parents with kids under age 12 who were polled, 43% said they were likely to get their child vaccinated when the vaccine became available for their age group. The results were similar among racial and ethnic groups.

Most parents cited either trust in the vaccine, concerns about safety, or already having recovered COVID as a reason for not getting vaccinated.

“These results reflect the glass half-full/glass half-empty experience we’ve had in the office. Many parents are interested, but many are hesitant,” Zickafoose said. “I encourage parents to speak with their child’s primary care provider about their concerns so they can have the best possible information to make their decision.”