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## Three Louisiana children died of COVID over the past week; total now at 21

BY EMILY WOODRUFF | Staff writer

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Staff inside one of the COVID-19 units at North Oaks Hospital monitor patients, Wednesday, August 4, 2021, in Hammond, La.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY LASALLE DETENTION CENTER

Three more Louisiana children died of COVID-19 in the last week, bringing the total number of kids who have been lost to the pandemic to 21, state officials said Tuesday.

Two of the recent deaths were in children under 5 years old, a group that is too young to be vaccinated. The third death was in a child between the ages of 5 and 17.

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Megan Wong, RN, gives Vivian Chappell, 7, her first COVID-19 vaccine at Children's Hospital in New Orleans on Friday, November 5, 2021. (Photo by Chris Granger | The Times-Picayune | The New Orleans Advocate)

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"Every life lost is a tragedy. That we have lost 21 children in our state to COVID-19, many of them not yet eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine, is unbearable," said Dr. Joseph Kanter, state health officer, in a prepared statement.

Kanter urged families to assess their risk this Carnival season and recommended well-fitting masks, vaccines and boosters to those eligible. He also said avoiding crowds and maskless indoor spaces could increase a child's protection.

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"Our young children who are not eligible to get the vaccine rely on us to protect them," said Kanter. "While cases are declining from our omicron surge, the risk is not zero."

The Louisiana Department of Health did not release additional details, including where the children were from or if they had pre-existing conditions.

Children account for about 18% of Louisiana's COVID cases. Although kids typically fare better than adults with COVID, some get seriously ill. Over 1,300 children in the U.S. have died of the virus since the pandemic began, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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At Children's Hospital New Orleans, about two-thirds of the children hospitalized with COVID had other conditions, said Dr. Mark Kline, physician in chief and infectious disease specialist. But many were conditions most might think of as mild.

"I want everyone to realize when we talk about underlying medical conditions, it can be something as seemingly innocuous as being overweight or having asthma," said Kline.

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None of the children who died this past week were treated at Children's Hospital, which receives young patients from all over the Gulf Coast.

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The recent deaths come as the omicron wave, Louisiana's fifth, recedes in the state. Although cases have decreased substantially – there were 4,706 reported over the last seven days compared to 40,611 one month prior – deaths always lag behind cases and hospitalizations.

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Statewide, there were 190 deaths over the last seven days, with 43 reported on Tuesday alone. In mid-January, right after cases peaked, there were 49 deaths in a week.

In other waves of infection, the rare but dangerous complication of COVID-19 known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, or MIS-C, followed deaths. It's something pediatricians are looking out for now, said Kline, but have not seen evidence of yet.

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Children over age five are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, and children ages 12 to 17 are eligible for a booster shot five months after their initial series. But relatively few in Louisiana have received a shot.

"We're still pathetically low on the numbers of children who have been vaccinated," said Kline.

Nine percent of Louisiana children ages 5 to 11 are vaccinated compared to 25% nationwide, ranking second-to-last among all states. In the 12 to 17 age group, 37% of Louisiana kids have been vaccinated compared to the U.S. average of 57%.





Tiffany Dickerson holds onto her twin five-year-old daughters, Elyce and Ayvri, as they take turns getting their COVID-19 vaccine at Children's Hospital in New Orleans on Friday, November 5, 2021. (Photo by Chris Granger | The Times-Picayune | The New Orleans Advocate)

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The state also has a low vaccination rate among adults with 52% fully vaccinated, ahead of just a handful of states: Alabama, Wyoming and Mississippi. The national average for adult COVID vaccination is 65%.

"At this point in pandemic, most of these deaths are preventable," said Kline. "We can't write off hundreds of child deaths by simply saying they have underlying medical problems, they were flawed, they're not like my child somehow. Every child who died was loved."

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