

US approves Covid-19 vaccines for youngest kids

WASHINGTON: US health authorities cleared the Pfizer and Moderna Covid-19 vaccines for children aged five and younger, in a move President Joe Biden greeted as a "monumental step" in the fight against the virus.

The United States thus became the first country to approve use of the so-called mRNA vaccines for children as young as six months.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had on Friday authorised their emergency use for young children – who previously had to be

at least five to receive the vaccine.

But the vaccines required further clearance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the country's leading public health agency – and they received that on Saturday.

"We know millions are eager to get their young children vaccinated, and with today's decision, they can," CDC director Rochelle Walensky said in a statement on Saturday.

Once the green light was received from the FDA, the US government began distributing millions of doses

of the vaccine across the country.

Biden promised that parents could begin scheduling appointments as early as next week to have their young children vaccinated at hospitals, clinics and pharmacies.

In coming weeks, with more and more doses shipped out, "every parent who wants a vaccine will be able to get one," he said.

The Moderna vaccine, administered in two doses a month apart, will be available to children aged six months to five years in reduced doses of 25 micrograms (half the

amount given to children aged six to 11, and a quarter the dose for those 12 and older).

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is now authorised for children aged six months to four years, and will be given three micrograms per injection – one-tenth the adult dosage.

The difference, however, is that children will receive three shots – the first two three weeks apart, followed by a third eight weeks later.

So, children receiving it will not have full protection for the first few months. — AFP