

Preparing for COVID 19 Vaccine

Vaccinations can be a source of anxiety for people of all ages and abilities. The best way to help make the experience more positive is to be prepared.

WHAT TO SAY

- Stay calm, speak in an even and soft tone of voice
- Answer questions honestly, and use words that lessen anxiety - for example, "you may feel pressure, squeezing, or poking". Do not use words such as "pain, hurt, or sting".
- You can say "You need the vaccine to stay healthy. The medicine will be put in your arm with a needle. You will feel a quick poke."
- Some kids may have already heard a lot about the COVID-19 vaccine, both true and untrue. When you talk about their vaccine appointment, listen closely to correct any confusion.



WHAT TO DO

Reassure your child that you'll be with them the entire time. Your presence is a big comfort. Would they like to hold your hand? Do a big countdown?

Deep Pressure: Cuddle your child firmly in your lap in a seated position. Provide deep pressure to arms and legs to help calm the sympathetic nervous system.

Deep breathing: Have your child focus on blowing out during the vaccine injection. Deep breathing makes the body relax its stress response. It also serves as a distraction. Ask your child to:

- Blow bubbles
- Blow out a pretend candle
- Blow a pinwheel or party blower

Distraction: Use bubbles, a pinwheel or a light-up or musical toy to distract your child immediately before and during the vaccination.

- Ask older children questions about something they are excited about. Older children can also use books, music players, or handheld video games to distract themselves.

Practise in Play: Use a favorite stuffed animal or doll to role play the vaccination appointment. Reinforce the steps involved in the appointment and then ask them what would make their stuffed animal feel better. Perhaps it's the same distraction or relaxation technique your child decides to use for themself.

Social Stories: Use social stories to frontload your child with the expectations around the vaccine appointment and to familiarise them with all the steps involved. It is important to review this story multiple times before the appointment.

Praise and Positive Reinforcement: When the shot is over, don't forget to give your child lots of praise.

- This is something that felt hard to do and they did it. That should be celebrated.
- Compliment them on the hug they gave you during the shot, or on staying still or doing great breathwork.
- By praising your child, you're reinforcing the positive behaviors, and setting your child up for more success the next time they need a vaccine.
- **Plan a reward.** Give your child something to look forward to! Plan something special to do after their vaccine, like a trip to the park, dedicated play time with a favorite toy, or something else.

Additional Strategies

- Choose an appointment time when you and your child are less likely to be stressed and aren't feeling rushed. If your child is in school, consider making an appointment for after school or on the weekend.
- If you anticipate that your child will have a difficult time with needles or shots, try exposing them to needles starting a few weeks before their appointment.
 - Read children's books about vaccinations
 - Watch videos catered to kids about vaccinations
- Bring band aids with fun cartoon characters to offer your child after the shot
- **Pack comfort items.** Have your child pick a toy or stuffed animal to keep them company. You might also bring a book, headphones or other soothing items and snacks.

For social stories and other COVID 19 resources please visit www.dsrf.org.