

Tips to Make Immunization Easier for Children

Be Calm and Prepare Yourself

Your child looks to you for how to act and feel. Use a calm, soft tone of voice. If you are nervous, take slow, deep breaths. Being calm shows your child that immunization is nothing to worry about.

Avoid taking a long time to talk young children into cooperating. This can make you and your child more anxious. Be kind but firm.

Prepare Your Child

Have your child wear a short-sleeved shirt or clothes that are easy to take off, so their legs or arms can be free for the immunization.

Calmly talk to your child about what will happen, how it will feel, and how to cope. Use words your child understands. For children 3 years of age or younger, you can do this when you get to the clinic. Prepare older children a day or more before. This gives them time to plan, but not too much time to worry.

Be honest and positive. Try not to use scary words (e.g., hurt, pain, shot) and do not say things that may not be true (e.g., the needle will not hurt). Do not tell your child that it will be over soon or apologize—this could make them worry.

Here is what you might say to a preschooler:

You will get a medicine to keep you healthy. The medicine is called a vaccine. It goes in your arm by a needle. You might feel a pinch for a few seconds. Some kids do not like it, but we are going to help make it easier for you.

If your child is being immunized at school and is very afraid of needles or has ever fainted, felt dizzy, or vomited right after a needle, talk to the school nurse before the immunization. The nurse will work with you to find the best way to immunize your nervous child (e.g., a shorter wait, lying down after the needle, having their parent with them).

Numb the Skin

Anaesthetic creams, gels, or patches are medicines which numb the skin and dull the pain of injections. If you would like to use an anaesthetic cream, gel, or patch, you can buy it at a pharmacy without a prescription. The pharmacist can help choose the right product for you or your child, show you how to use it safely, and talk about possible side effects. See the [Injection Sites for Routine Immunizations](#) chart for more information.

If your child is being immunized at school and you want to use an anaesthetic cream, gel, or patch, it is your responsibility to make sure the medicine is put on at the correct time. The nurse will not be able to put the medicine on or wait for it to start working.

Do not use cooling sprays or pain medicine (pills or liquids) before the immunization. They do not help with needle pain.

Have Your Child Sit Up

Have a younger child sit up on your lap, and hug them close, but not too tightly. Your nurse will show you how to hold your child so the leg or arm stays still for the needle.

Teach older children how to relax their arm and hold it still.

Distract Your Child

Babies (Birth to 2 Years of Age)

Breastfeeding before, during, and after immunization can make your baby feel less pain and distress. Do not worry—your baby will not choke. You can also give your baby a bottle of breastmilk or formula. If you choose not to feed your baby during immunization, give them a little sugar water just before. Being held closely, sucking, the sweet taste, and feeling full may help your baby be calm.

Sugar Water

You can buy sugar water at a pharmacy. Or you can make it at home by mixing 1 teaspoon of table sugar (not honey) with 2 teaspoons of boiled water. Give 2 mL to your baby 1 to 2 minutes before immunization using a dropper or syringe at the side of their mouth. Or dip a soother into the sugar water and give it to your baby. Do not give sugar water to calm your baby at home.

If your baby is getting rotavirus vaccine, they do not need sugar water because this vaccine is given by mouth and it tastes sweet.

Try distracting older babies with toys, singing, or talking. Rocking or walking your baby after immunization may also help.

Preschoolers (3 to 5 Year Olds)

Start distracting your child before the immunization, when they are calm. Plan ahead and bring what you need from home. Let your child choose a toy, book, or game to bring with them. A few good ideas are blowing on a pinwheel, or pretending to blow out candles (they help your child take slow, deep breaths, which may calm them). You can also try singing songs or showing a video. Have more than 1 activity in case you need it.

School-Aged Children





Help your child think of distraction ideas they can do before, during, and after immunization. Activities that need their full attention are best. Think of more than 1 activity in case they need it. Some ideas are:

- Talking about your child's favourite things.
- Reading a book.
- Counting.
- Watching a video.
- Listening to music.
- Thinking about a "happy place".

Praise Your Child and Plan for Next Time

After the immunization, say things like, "I am so happy you got the vaccine!"; "I knew you could do it!"; and "You sat so still for the nurse!". This helps your child feel good and gives them confidence in their coping skills. Use what you learned to plan for the next time.

For More Information

-  Go to Immunize Canada at <http://immunize.ca/en/parents/pain.aspx>
-  Go to immunizealberta.ca
-  Go to myhealth.alberta.ca
-  Call Health Link at 811

