

# Healthy choices, healthy children

## Tips for parents for a positive immunization experience

Vaccination is important for your children's health and well-being. In fact, vaccines have saved the lives of more babies and children than any other medical development in the last 50 years. Still, whether you're a child or an adult, getting a needle isn't much fun.

Most children will feel some pain (like a pinch or a sting) during a vaccination, which may cause them to have a fear of doctors, nurses and needles. To help, there are some things you can do before, during and after the visit to make the process less stressful.

### Before your visit

- Be prepared! Read any information about vaccinations that your health care provider has given you, and write down any questions you want to ask.
- Before your child's vaccination appointment, discuss your plan for pain reduction with your health care provider, so they can support you in this plan.
- Make sure your child's immunization record (the "yellow card") is up-to-date and bring it to the visit. It lets your health care provider know what vaccines your child has received. If this is your child's first shot, your health care provider will give the yellow card to you after this visit.
- Tell your children the reason why they're getting vaccinated: so that they'll stay healthy. You might think about telling young children (under 4 years of age) the day of the visit, and telling older children a day or two before. This way, you can help them get used to the idea, and they won't be surprised at the appointment.



### Helpful hints

- ◀ Don't tell scary stories about vaccines. They are a normal – and important – part of making sure that your children stay healthy.
- ◀ Don't apologize. For example, saying "I'm sorry you have to go through this", or "It will be over soon" may make your child think the injection will be worse than it is.
- ◀ Consider using a medication that numbs the skin (either a cream or a patch), which can be purchased without a prescription. Talk to your health care provider about when and where to put on the cream or patch before your visit.



- The pain centres in the brain are less active when children are distracted during vaccinations:
  - ◆ If you are breastfeeding, feed your baby before, during and after immunization. The physical closeness and familiar taste of breast milk will calm your baby. Breastfeeding during immunization is safe for babies, even newborns. There is no evidence that babies will choke or associate their mothers with pain.
  - ◆ For babies 12 months of age or younger who cannot be breastfed during vaccination, a mixture of sugar and sterile water may be offered by your health care provider a few minutes before immunization. This sweet-tasting drink causes the release of natural pain-reducing chemicals in the brain. For children older than 6 months of age, a sweet drink – such as fruit juice – can have a similar effect.
  - ◆ For younger children, chat quietly or sing a song with them. Bring a favourite toy, book or blanket with you. Having something to calm your children will help them through the process.
  - ◆ For older children, bring a book or media player so they can read or listen to music.
- Holding babies or very young children in your arms and hugging them in an upright position will help comfort them during the vaccination. Discuss positioning options with your health care provider.
- Older children should relax their arm. If their arm muscle is tensed, the pain will be worse.
- Rub your child's arm before, during and after the vaccination. The sensation of touch from your hand, rubbing an area of the arm away from the injection site, will compete with the pain experienced from the needle. Don't rub directly on the injection site, as this can increase the feeling of pain.

## Helpful hints

- ⚡ Explain that the shot may sting or pinch, but only for a few seconds. Getting a vaccine is very quick!
- ⚡ Try to stay calm **before, during and after** the needle. This will help your child stay calm.
- ⚡ Help your child "blow out the pain" by taking long, deep breaths. Deep breathing will help you and your child relax.
- ⚡ Take your child's attention away from the needle, as this will reduce his or her anxiety and pain.
- ⚡ For infants, judge how much pain they feel by looking at their body movements, facial expressions and sounds. This way, you can use what you see to plan what you will do the next time to help reduce your baby's pain.
- ⚡ Recognize the effort. After immunization, hold, cuddle and, for infants, breastfeed or offer a bottle. Be positive and help your child feel good about the experience. Avoid focusing on the pain. Give praise to your child; consider such phrases as "You did a fantastic job", or "Now you know you can do it!"

## After your visit



- Review any information your health care provider gives you about vaccines, especially information that describes any mild reactions that might happen; for example, pain from the needle, a rash or a fever. These reactions are normal and will go away very quickly.
- Before you leave the appointment, ask your health care provider for suggestions about using non-aspirin medications (for example, Tylenol) to relieve pain, as well as other steps you can take at home to comfort your child.

## Helpful hints

- ◀ Use a cool, wet cloth to reduce any redness, soreness or swelling where the vaccine was given.
- ◀ Reduce fever by sponging your child's face, arms and legs with a warm cloth.
- ◀ If your health care provider advises, give your child a non-aspirin pain reliever.
- ◀ Give your child lots of liquid; it's normal for some children to eat less during the 24 hours after getting a vaccine.
- ◀ Pay extra attention to your child for a few days. If you see something that concerns you, call your health care provider.
- ◀ If your children attend school, report their vaccinations to your local public health unit. Your health care provider does not report these records for you. Visit [ontario.ca/vaccines](https://ontario.ca/vaccines) to learn how to report your child's immunization records.

## Stay up to date with your children's vaccinations.

It's important to make sure that you and your family are protected against disease.

For more information on immunization, please contact your health care provider and visit [ontario.ca/vaccines](https://ontario.ca/vaccines).