



Tips for easing kids' fears about getting the COVID-19 vaccine

1. Talk to your child

Have a conversation with your child about what they can expect during their COVID-19 vaccine. It is important use age appropriate language that your child will understand.

Ages 5-7

- Give a simple step-by-step description of what to expect
- Use senses to help your child image the experience:
 - Here is what you will **see** at the clinic ... (e.g., nurses, doctors, parents and children)
 - This is what you might **hear** ... (e.g., someone saying welcome and giving directions, someone telling you about the vaccine, possibly other children crying)
 - This is what you might **feel** on your body ... (e.g. a small pinch from the vaccine)
 - Afterwards we will wait for 15 minutes to make sure you **feel** okay
- Use play to help children prepare for their vaccine. For example, use stuffed animals to practice getting the vaccine.

Ages 8-11

- Older children may have more detailed questions. Give honest answers and get information from trusted sources.
- Help your child to think about what has helped them get through difficult situations in the past. Encourage your child to write a list of questions or concerns to ask the nurse or doctor at the appointment.
- Talk to your child about being brave, even if they may be afraid or worried about the experience.

2. Focus on comfort and distraction

One strategy for coping with vaccine anxiety is to let your child choose items that will provide a distraction and increase comfort. Plan for your child to wear loose and comfortable clothing that has easy access to the upper arm, such as a t-shirt.

Have a snack before and after the vaccination.

Consider using a numbing cream or patch (i.e. topical anaesthetic) on the skin before getting the vaccine.

Ages 5-7

- Let your child choose an item to bring with them that will keep them distracted (e.g. pop-it, fidget spinner or a video on a phone/tablet).
- Give your child the option of bringing an item that will give them comfort (e.g. a stuffed toy)
- Ask your child if they would like to hold your hand while they get vaccinated.



Ages 8-11

- Have your child create a music or video playlist for use during their vaccination.
- Encourage your child to bring items that will help them release their tension (e.g. a stress ball or slime).
- Remind your child that they can look away during the vaccination.

3. Focus on breathing

Deep breathing and mindfulness can be effective tools at any age. Practicing these techniques can help to relax during the vaccination.

- **The Bunny Breath:** Take three quick sniffs through the nose and one long exhale through the nose. As your child gets the hang of it, have them focus on making the exhale slower and slower.
- **Smell the Rose/Blow out the Candle:** While holding up your index finger, take a deep breath in through your nose to smell the rose, and slowly exhale through your mouth to blow out the candle.
- Find other technique using a mindfulness app.

4. Validate feelings and stay calm

Getting a vaccine can bring up a lot of fears for both children and adults. No one wants to see their child upset or scared. However children can pick up on adult anxiety. If you remain calm, it will help keep your child calm.

If your child becomes scared, it is important to validate their feelings by saying things like "it's okay to feel nervous or scared." Avoid saying things like "it's just a shot" or "don't worry". Remind them that they are not alone, you are there to support them.

5. Plan for after the COVID-19 vaccine

Celebrating and praising your child can have a positive impact on them. Let them know how proud you are of them.

You will stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after the vaccination for observation. Plan an activity for this time.

Your child may have side effects after the vaccine such as soreness where the vaccine was given, tiredness, and chills. These tend to be mild and go away after 1 to 3 days. You can give your child over-the-counter medications if needed. Help your child plan for how they can be comfortable after the vaccine such as a favourite movie, game or family activity.