

# Tips for immunising children (12+)

## Smile, smile, smile!

A smile helps a child feel comfortable and safe in an unfamiliar setting, so be sure put on your best one when you welcome them to their appointment. They will be looking at you for reassurance.

## Be honest, but reassuring

Never tell a child that a needle won't hurt. Try saying 'Everyone feels things differently. Some kids have told me it feels like a little pinch, others but it's over very quickly.'

## Quickly build rapport

- It's important to earn a child's trust quickly. After greeting them, ask them about their interests, their day... or what they are looking forward to after the immunisation
- Empower them with the choice of deciding what they want to know (and don't want to know!). Before you give the vaccination, ask them:
  - if they have any questions about the vaccine
  - they want you to explain the process before you do it, or
  - they'd prefer not to know what's about to happen.
- If a child is anxious, building a rapport quickly and not delaying the vaccination is important.

## Tell them what to expect and why their vaccination is important (if they want to know)

- Provide age appropriate education to the child on why they need the vaccination, e.g. 'You're having a needle to help protect you and your family against COVID-19'.
- Tell them what to expect, e.g. 'The needle will be quick, you will then have to wait for a little while afterwards until you go home'.
- A 'social story' may be helpful to explain the process for some children.
- Explain and normalise possible side effects after the needle, e.g. 'Some kids have said their arm was a bit sore for a day or so after, but this is normal'.
- Discuss strategies to manage possible side-effects, e.g. 'Other kids have told us it helps to drink lots of water on the day of the needle' or 'Other kids found using an icepack helps after the needle'.
- Allow children time and space to ask questions.
- Check with the parents if the child typically has any preferences for procedures.

## Empower them with choice

It can help to allow the child to feel involved in the process by providing reasonable and age-appropriate choices and control. Ask them:

- Do they have any questions about the injection?
- Which arm would you like the injection in?
- Do you want to watch the injection happen or look away?
- Do you want me to countdown to when the injection starts?
- Would you like Mum or Dad to hold your hand?
- Do you want to do something that distracts you from the injection?
  - Watching something on a phone or device
  - Listening to music



## The power of distraction

It can sometimes help to describe distraction as a 'super power' that can help make the needle hurt less because they are using their brain to focus on something other than the needle.

## Distraction techniques

- Ask the child to rub the spot for 30 seconds – a free and simple tactic!
- Buzzy Bee is a small, vibrating bee that is placed on the injection site to help block sharp pain and provide a distraction. See [buzzy4shots.com.au](http://buzzy4shots.com.au)
- Fidget toys
- Ipad/tablets with games, videos
- 'I spy' – Ask the child to spot an a toy, sticker, picture or other distracting item hidden somewhere in the room or cubicle.

## Some final practical tips

- Always aim to avoid physical restraint with an anxious child, however, if required, provide a comfort hold.
- If possible position the waiting room away from injection rooms (so waiting children do not see any distressed, teary children post injection)
- If more than one family member is being vaccinated at the appointment, suggest the young person has theirs first to minimise exposure to watching others being vaccinated.

For more information about COVID-19 and children, visit: [childrens.health.qld.gov.au/covid-19](http://childrens.health.qld.gov.au/covid-19)

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