



A better immunization experience for your child

Prepare for Your Child's Vaccines

Vaccines or shots may cause some pain. These tips can lead to a more positive immunization experience for both you and your child.

Tip #1: Prepare your child before the visit

All ages:

- Children are very aware of the emotions of their caregivers. Although immunizations may be stressful for you, try to be calm during the appointment and when talking about immunization with your child
- Use a matter-of-fact, supportive approach

Toddlers and young children:

In general, toddlers and pre-school age children over 2 years of age should be informed about the vaccine shortly before the clinic visit or appointment.

For school age children:

One day of advance preparation is enough for most school age children. Older children may benefit from longer preparation time, but it can depend on how your child copes.

When you discuss the vaccine and clinic visit with your child:

DO:

- 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.”

DO NOT:

- Use words that focus the child’s attention on the needle, such as “It will be over soon and you will be okay.”
- Give false reassurance, such as “It won’t hurt.” See “do” section above for suggested answers to the question, “will it hurt?”
- Apologize – for example, “I am really sorry you have to go through this.”

Consider using numbing creams and patches:

These products ease the feeling of pain by blocking pain receptors in the skin. Apply the product according to the package instructions generally 60 minutes before the appointment. Supervise your child after you apply the product so that they don’t accidentally eat the cream or patch. Numbing creams and patches can be bought without a prescription at most pharmacies.

For specific information on where to apply numbing creams or patches, ask your health care provider.

Tip #2: Comfort your child at the appointment

Use these tips to comfort your child at the appointment.

Children of all ages:

- **Comforting restraint:** Cuddle your baby or child firmly in your lap in a seated position.

Why? Being held close to you calms your child and helps keep legs and arms still so vaccines can be given safely. Sitting upright helps children feel more secure and in control. Ask the health care provider for examples of upright positioning.

- **Distraction:** Use bubbles, a pinwheel or a squeaky, 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 hand held video games to distract themselves.

Why? Research shows that the part of the brain that processes pain is less active when children are distracted during immunizations.

Babies:

- **Breastfed babies:** Nurse your baby before, during, and after the immunization. Research shows that this is safe and will not cause the baby to associate breastfeeding with pain.

Why? Breastfeeding comforts your baby. Sucking and the sweet taste of breast milk distract your baby. Breast milk also contains natural calming substances.

- **Formula fed babies:** A sucrose solution can be given immediately before the immunization for babies up to and including 12 months of age.

Why? Research shows that this sweet tasting solution, given 1-2 minutes before a medical procedure, causes the release of natural pain reducing chemicals in the brain.

You can prepare a sucrose solution at home and bring it with you to your child's immunization appointment. Health Canada recommends that all water given to infants be sterilized.

To prepare the sucrose solution:

- Bring cold tap water to a rolling boil for at least 2 minutes.
- Dissolve 1 teaspoon of sugar in 10 ml (2 teaspoons) of the boiled water in a sterile sealable container.
- Store the sucrose solution in the refrigerator prior to your child's appointment. The solution should be used within 24 hours.

At the appointment, give 2 ml of the sucrose solution to your baby with a cup, spoon or syringe 1-2 minutes before the immunization and discard the unused portion.

Do not use sugar at home to calm upset or crying babies.

Children 3 years of age and older:

- **Deep breathing:** Have your child focus on blowing out during the vaccine injection. Ask your child to:
 - Blow bubbles
 - Blow out a pretend candle
 - Blow a pinwheel or party blower

Why? Deep breathing makes the body relax its stress response. It also serves as a distraction.

Trying these techniques can turn clinic visits or immunization appointments into a chance to teach children skills for managing potentially scary or difficult situations.

For more information on immunizations visit Immunize BC at <https://immunizebc.ca/>.

More HealthLinkBC Files on childhood immunization:

[#50a Your baby's immune system and vaccines](#)

[#50b The benefits of vaccinating your child](#)

[#50c Childhood vaccines are safe](#)

[#50d Childhood vaccines: What is in the vaccines and why](#)



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