

Supporting Your Young Child Before, During and After COVID-19 Vaccination



You may have questions about what the COVID-19 vaccination process will look like for your baby, toddler or preschooler. The focus of this resource is to provide you with guidance to help you prepare your child, language to use when talking to them about the vaccine, and strategies to soothe and support your child throughout their experience.

To help guide these conversations with your young child, CHOP child life specialists offer these helpful tips.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Your comfort level with the vaccine experience may influence how your child reacts. (e.g., If you are apprehensive, your baby will be too.)
- Use age-appropriate strategies – including distraction and comfort positioning – to help your child relax and feel safe.
- When possible, schedule your child's vaccination appointment for a time that's best for them. (e.g., first thing in the morning if that's when they're happiest, or late in the day when they can go home and rest afterward)
- Never hesitate to talk to your child's healthcare team about any question you have, or your child's specific needs.

PREPARE YOUR CHILD

While infants respond to the emotions and actions of their caregivers and there is less you can do to prepare them in a way they'll understand, toddlers and preschoolers are growing more curious and may begin to ask questions.

For toddlers or preschoolers, tell them about their vaccine a day or two before the visit. While your child may become mad or upset upon hearing this information, it's still important for most children to be prepared for this experience. Remind them you will be with them and that they are safe.

Validate their concerns. Let them know it is OK to feel upset and allow them to pick out something special from home to bring with them to the appointment. Depending on your child's age/maturity, one way to prepare your child is to provide honest, simple information about the vaccine in language they can understand. If your child is worried the vaccine will hurt, explain it might feel like a pinch or a poke, and their job is to try to be as still as a statue.

Playing with doctor kits is one way for children to work out their feelings or anxieties related to medical experiences. You may want to consider adding items such as BAND-AIDS®, cotton balls, tape, gauze, etc. Learn about medical play and its therapeutic benefits at www.chop.edu/medicalplay.

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HOW CAN I COMFORT MY CHILD DURING SHOTS?

Comfort positioning

Comfort positions during vaccinations can help children feel safe and secure while remaining as upright as possible.

Being held in the arms of a caregiver can help create a more normal experience, especially for infants. Wrapping your baby's upper body in a blanket while cradling them in your arms helps them feel safe but still allows the clinician to reach their thigh or upper arm to administer the vaccines.

For toddlers, explain to your child that you are giving them a big hug to help remind their bodies to hold still, and their job is to hug you back. One effective position for a toddler is sitting on a caregiver's lap, chest to chest. This is a good position for vaccines that go into the arm or leg. Another lap position is back to chest. This helps prevent the child from kicking or wiggling.

Distraction techniques for immunizations

In addition to comfort positioning, distraction techniques can be used to help your child focus on something more pleasant during the short time it takes to be vaccinated.

Bring an item that typically comforts or distracts your child (a favorite stuffed animal, blanket, pacifier, toy that makes noise or lights up, or a seek-and-find book).

Depending on your child's age/maturity, other comfort and distraction techniques include:

- Breastfeeding
- Teething toys or rings
- Speaking in a soft, calm voice
- Listening to music; singing or humming
- Reading a book together
- Using the room to play "I spy"
- Hugging a comfort item
- Watching a video on your phone or iPad

While some children like to look away during immunization, others will choose to watch. Either way is appropriate. If your child prefers to watch, allow them to do so because it will build trust and increase their sense of control over the situation.



PAIN MANAGEMENT

Preparation, distraction techniques and comfort positioning combined can reduce fear and anxiety, as well as pain. For more pain management options, talk to your child's healthcare team.

SOOTHING YOUR BABY OR YOUNG CHILD AFTER INJECTIONS

Consider doing the following:

- Praising your child for specific behaviors like holding still or taking big breaths
- Helping your child identify how they are feeling and validate their emotions
- Encouraging your child to return to their routine, to promote a sense of normalcy



Scan this QR code to access videos demonstrating comfort positions for babies, toddlers and preschoolers receiving vaccinations.