

Childhood vaccinations don't have to be painful, researchers say

August 26 2009, By Suzanne Gold

(PhysOrg.com) -- Most people associate childhood vaccinations with pain, but new Canadian research shows this doesn't have to be the case.

In a comprehensive scientific overview published in the August supplement of the journal *Clinical Therapeutics*, scientists at the University of Toronto, the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), Dalhousie University, the University of Western Ontario and Mount Sinai Hospital analysed data from 71 studies involving 8,050 children to determine the best physical, psychological and pharmacologic strategies to minimize vaccine injection [pain](#) in children.

Vaccines are medications that protect against [infectious diseases](#) and are usually given with a needle, which can be painful. Vaccine injections are often distressing for children, their families and even for participating healthcare professionals. Experts have found that negative experiences with vaccine injections can lead to anxiety at future procedures and needle fears. People with needle fears may decline necessary procedures such as vaccinations and blood tests in an effort to avoid pain.

"Pain influences how people make choices in health care," said Professor Anna Taddio of the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy and an adjunct scientist and pharmacist at SickKids, lead author of the overview. "It's a problem to let kids suffer when they don't have to."

According to Taddio, the research team aims to empower parents to be informed about managing their child's pain and encourages parents to

discuss various strategies with their child's healthcare professional.

"If we can teach parents from the start to help manage their child's pain, we can go a long way towards reducing the lifetime burden of pain," she said, adding that if parents learn about [pain management](#) early (i.e., when their infant begins having vaccinations), this knowledge will help guide them through other painful medical procedures as the child grows up.

So what can parents and healthcare professionals do to help reduce vaccine injection pain in children? Taddio's recommended strategies include:

You and your child:

- Stay calm and maintain a positive atmosphere; actions and words can influence the child's reaction.
- Plan to take your child's attention away from the procedure using distraction (use toys, slow down breathing by having the child blow bubbles, tell jokes).
- Plan to provide physical comfort (hug the child).
- Plan other pain-relieving interventions (breastfeeding or administration of sugar water, topical anesthetics).

Your child's healthcare professional:

- Let the doctor or nurse know what pain-management strategies you are planning for your child's vaccine injections and try to enlist their support.
- Ask them to make vaccine injections less painful by administering intramuscular vaccines quickly without aspiration and administering the most painful vaccine last when more than one vaccine is given during the same visit.

To download a detailed list of specific pain-management strategies for childhood vaccinations, visit

[www.sickkids.ca/pdfs/About-Sic ... 7-Immunizations_pain%20release_chart.pdf](http://www.sickkids.ca/pdfs/About-Sick-Kids-7-Immunizations_pain%20release_chart.pdf)

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