

For kids afraid of needles, these tips may help ease COVID shots

November 5 2021, by Dennis Thompson



(HealthDay)—Across the country, children ages 5 to 11 are lining up to

get their first dose of Pfizer's newly approved COVID-19 pediatric vaccine.

Most kids fear needles, but a few simple steps can help your young one get their COVID-19 shots with the fewest tears shed, experts say.

First, you need to get your own head together, said Dr. Vera Feuer, director of emergency psychiatry and behavioral health urgent care at Cohen Children's Medical Center in New Hyde Park, N.Y.

"Before talking to your child about the vaccine, check your own temperature first," Feuer said. "Make sure you are calm and present it in a matter-of-fact, confident manner, so your child can feel good and safe about getting the vaccine. Children pick up on their parents' stress and anxiety, and it is very important to model good coping for them."

Once you've got yourself in the right frame of mind, prepare your child for what they should expect at the doctor's office, pharmacy or community clinic.

It's better if you have this conversation a day or so before their appointment, and to be completely honest about the experience, said Dr. Catherine Pourdavoud, a pediatrician with the Calabasas Pediatrics Wellness Center in Calabasas, Calif.

"You want to build trust for future vaccines and doctor's visits, too, so it's best not to surprise your child on the day of the vaccine or tell them it won't hurt," Pourdavoud said.

Language matters

At the same time, there's nothing wrong with couching your conversation in words that are less scary to kids, Pourdavoud added.

"Using words like 'poke' or 'pinch' instead of 'shot' or 'needle' can create a more positive experience for your child," Pourdavoud said.

Be sure it's a two-way conversation, Feuer added. Ask them about their fears and concerns related to getting a shot, and correct any misinformation they might have.

"With kids that are younger or particularly scared, practicing at home with a doll or reading books about it can also be helpful in alleviating fears," Feuer said.

On the day of their appointment, take pains to help your child feel as in control of the experience as they can, Feuer said.

"We all feel better and less anxious when we feel in control," Feuer said. "Whatever choices can be given to your child, let them choose. The shirt they wear, the arm they get the shot in, who they go to the appointment with, what toy to bring for comfort or distraction—find and offer choices whenever you can, so kids can feel that the situation is in their control."

In fact, asking your child to choose a favorite stuffed animal, toy or game to bring along can help them remain calm during the vaccination, Pourdavoud said.

"She can hug teddy tightly or hold both his hand and yours when she is getting her poke," Pourdavoud said. "For older [children](#), their comfort item might be a phone or tablet to watch a video or listen to music on before and during their immunization—even pediatricians approve of [screen time](#) for distracting during vaccines and procedures."

Make your pediatrician your partner

Feuer and Pourdavoud both recommend reaching out to your pediatrician ahead of time, to come up with the best plan to both ease your child's fears and get them through the shot.

"Engage your pediatric providers in making a plan and preparing your child," Feuer said. "They have a lot of experience in getting kids through painful moments like this."

When it's your kid's turn, you can offer to let them sit in your lap or hold your hand, the experts said. You might sing a song with them, or do something else that distracts them from the needle.

Your doctor might be able to apply a numbing cream or spray prior to the shot, to lessen the sensation of the prick, Pourdavoud said. There also are vibration devices that can help distract your child's brain from the needle poke.

And once it's all done, be sure to reward your child with praise and attention.

"After your child gets the vaccine, congratulate and praise her on what an amazing job she did and just how proud you are of her!" Pourdavoud said. "Give her a high-five, warm tight hug, or sticker.

"You may even want to stop by the park on the way home to hop on the swing, buy a special treat like a new book from the bookstore, or share some ice cream to create a positive memory from the experience," she continued. "Even if your child cried or screamed, still praise her when it's done! Nobody likes getting shots, and your [child](#) was super brave."

More information: Children's Hospital Colorado has more about [helping your kids cope with shots](#).

Copyright © 2021 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

Citation: For kids afraid of needles, these tips may help ease COVID shots (2021, November 5) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-kids-needles-ease-covid-shots.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.