

Getting your child their vaccine? Some tips on easing needle fears

January 4 2022



(HealthDay News)—If your child gets upset when it's time to get a shot,

you know how challenging that experience is—for both of you.

Yet, vaccines are an essential fact of life, especially in the age of COVID-19. Children aged 5 and up are advised to get the COVID [vaccine](#) or, depending on their age, a COVID booster. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Monday approved Pfizer [booster shots](#) for kids aged 12 to 15.

Getting a shot doesn't have to be anxiety-inducing, according to experts from Children's Hospital of Los Angeles.

Chloe Reichert, [child](#) life specialist in the hospital's infusion center, said age-appropriate honesty is the best first step. Let your kids know they need shots, that the shots might hurt a little and that the nurse wants this to be as quick and as painless as possible.

"Kids already have this innate fear of anything involving needles or pokes," Reichert said. "A lot of [kids' fear about shots] comes from the way their parents talk to them about medical experiences, and one of our biggest challenges can often be the messaging they get about this environment before they even come through our doors."

Avital Abraham, another child life specialist, said parents should only say as much as a child can understand based on their age and developmental level.

"Once [children] walk through those doors and meet me, I always will give them a developmentally appropriate step-by-step explanation of what the visit is going to look like," said Abraham, who works in the hospital's outpatient clinics. "I might tell a 3-year-old getting a [flu vaccine](#), for example, 'Even though this hurts, it will help your body not get sick as much,' but that might not work for a 10-year-old."

"When [kids are] older, it's explaining how vaccines work, how they help, and why we give them," Abraham said.

Time the information depending on the child. Some may benefit from knowing in advance, and some may need to know about the shot just before they get it.

"Often, a child's anticipatory anxiety makes it so much worse than the actual poke," Reichert said. "It can be a delicate balance between providing the information they need in advance, while also not giving them too much time to build [anxiety](#)."

Keep your own feelings about the shots in check, the experts suggest. Children can pick up on those cues.

Trust the healthcare workers to do their jobs. These nurses and other medical professionals administer dozens, or even hundreds, of vaccines daily.

Abraham said she typically tries to work in concert with parents to get a sense of how a child is feeling about the vaccine, and whether the child has any special needs she should know about.

Abraham also offers the kids a sense of control, asking if they want to look or not, which arm they prefer and whether they prefer a countdown to the shot.

"Kids want control over situations where they don't feel comfortable, and asking these questions can provide it," Abraham says. "They don't have a choice about the shot but giving them the power to decide how they sit or whether we count or whether they watch [the procedure] can help them get through it."

Abraham suggests that adults can share [personal stories](#) about their own experiences with the [COVID-19 vaccine](#) to help ease fears that their children might be experiencing in the moment.

"Something unique about the COVID vaccine is that adults and kids alike are getting it now," she said. "If a child is fearful and a parent or I say, 'We got this shot, too,' it changes the conversation. Suddenly the child might feel more at ease and ask, 'What did you do to help get through it?' That can make a huge difference for everybody involved."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [COVID-19 vaccines for kids](#).

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Citation: Getting your child their vaccine? Some tips on easing needle fears (2022, January 4) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-child-vaccine-easing-needle.html>

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