

Preparing a Child for a COVID-19 Vaccine

We know that children can get the COVID-19 virus and spread it to others. The last variant of the virus, called the Delta variant, was more contagious in children. This means more children got sick with the Delta variant than the original virus. As of October 2021, vaccines are approved for people aged 5 years and older. Check www.cdc.gov or www.vaccines.gov for more information.

? Preparing My Child Before the Visit

It is important to talk with your child before they get their vaccine, or shot. Children may feel scared or nervous about getting the shot. Tell them what to expect. We suggest talking to younger children right before the shot. Older children may need more time to prepare.

For toddlers, you can say something like, “Today you are getting a shot to help keep you healthy. It will help keep you safe from getting sick. The shot will be a little poke that might hurt, but I will be there to help you.”

For older children, you can say something like, “In a few days we are going to the doctor to get a shot. This is called a vaccine and helps you stay healthy. It will feel like a little poke that might hurt for a few seconds. It will be over in the time you take one deep breath and let it out. Let’s practice that now.”

It can be helpful to practice what will happen the day of the shot. This can be very helpful for children with disabilities. This may reduce anxiety about getting the shot. Here are examples of things to talk to your children about before the day of the shot:

- Describe how you’ll get to the vaccine site. Say where you are going and how long it will take.
- Explain how you will check in when you arrive.
- Talk about wearing a mask the whole time.



Preparing My Child Before the Visit - Continued

- Explain the shot process. You can say things like
- The healthcare professional will have to touch you to give you the shot.
- They will clean your arm or leg.
- You will feel a small pinch.
- You will get a band aid.
- I will be there the whole time.
- Explain why you must wait before leaving.
- Help your child understand why they are getting the shot. Compare it to other ways of staying safe, such as wearing a mask or social distancing. You can say something like, “You know how we have to wear masks when we go to the grocery store? This shot will keep us safe just like that.”



The Day of the Visit at the Doctor’s Office or Clinic

Doctor’s offices or large vaccine sites can be scary or overwhelming. Remind your child where you are going and why. It may be helpful for them to bring a favorite stuffed animal, toy, or fidget object. Plan to arrive early. Allow extra time if you have never been to this place before. Your child may tell if you are feeling rushed or overwhelmed. It is important that you stay calm to help them stay calm.



Providing Support During the Shot

Focus on being calm. Speak slowly and softly. It may be helpful to distract your child during the shot. You can do this with a toy or activity such as:

- Singing a song
- Telling a joke
- Watching a video on your phone
- Showing them something in your bag



Providing Support During the Shot - Continued

Most children do best if they do not see the needle. Show them how to take deep breaths. It may be helpful to hold your child during the shot. Sometimes rubbing their back can help them relax. The goal is for your child to feel safe and to keep them still during the shot.

It can be helpful to provide the child with a reward to celebrate their success. Rewarding with things like going to the park or enjoying ice cream. This can help them understand what they did was brave and the best thing to keep them safe.



After the Vaccine and Potential Side Effects

Everyone who gets the COVID-19 vaccine must wait 15-minutes at the vaccine site before leaving. This is normal to make sure they are feeling okay before leaving.

Side effects are normal with any vaccine and are a sign that the vaccine is doing its job to protect the body against the virus. Common side effects for children are the same for adults. These may include a sore arm, tiredness, headache, muscle pain, fever, chills, or upset stomach. These side effects are normal and should go away within a few days. Some people have no side effects.

Ask your child's doctor about any concerns you might have, including

- If there are any severe side effects to watch for
- Ways to treat side effects to help your child feel more comfortable
- Who to call if you think your child is having a severe reaction
- How soon the child may need a second shot or booster shot

Getting the shot is important. Getting the vaccine is the best way to stay safe from COVID-19, but there are other ways to stay healthy. Explain to your child that they still may need to wear a mask and social distance. If they need a second shot or a booster shot, put it on the calendar so you can prepare, together.

