



Reducing Your Child's Pain with Immunization

Why is pain from immunization a concern?

Vaccines protect your child from serious diseases. Most children feel pain from the experience. Pain may cause your child to develop a fear of needles or other medical procedures.

What can I do to reduce my child's pain from immunization?

- **If you are breastfeeding, breastfeed before, during and after the needle.** Breastfeeding calms and comforts both the baby and mother and can reduce baby's pain.
- **If you are not breastfeeding, sugar water can be given to infants less than 12 months.** To make sugar water, mix one packet of sugar (1 teaspoon) with 10 ml of water (2 teaspoons). Give it to your baby with a cup, spoon or syringe just before the needle and discard the unused portion. *DO NOT use sugar at home to calm your upset or crying baby.* Sugar water only helps to reduce pain when it is given before the pain starts. Therefore it will not work for other sources of pain (i.e. teething). Be sure to wipe your baby's gums with water after using the sugar water.
Please note: Rotavirus vaccine, which is an oral vaccine recommended for infants at their 2 & 4 month visits, contains sugar and will have the same effect as sugar water.
- **Allow your baby to suck** when receiving the needle.
- **Plan what to bring to the visit.** Help your child choose items to bring that are interesting (e.g. toys, books) and provide comfort (e.g. favorite blanket, stuffed animal).
- **Consider using medications to numb the skin.** Three products are available in Canada without a prescription: EMLA® (lidocaine/prilocaine), Ametop® (amethocaine), or Maxilene® (liposomal lidocaine). The products can take 30 to 60 minutes to work, depending on the brand.

Before using any medication, read the information provided and talk to your health care provider to learn how, where and how much medication to apply.

- **Have your child sit up-right when receiving the vaccine.** Hug or cuddle young children in your lap for comfort. Do not lay your child flat.
- **Stay calm when your child receives the needle.** Your child can sense your feelings of worry which may increase his or her fear. The more fearful a child is before receiving a needle, the more pain he or she may feel.
- **Be yourself: use a normal voice, smile and be relaxed.** Your child will feel that everything is okay.
- **Avoid words that can focus a child's attention on the needle and increase fear** such as:
"It'll be over soon and you'll be okay", "I'm sorry you have to go through this", or "I know it hurts."
- **Talk about things** that can focus your child's attention away from getting a needle.
- **Involve your child** when speaking to your health care provider by helping them to remember:
 - an outing to the park;
 - a fun or interesting activity done at home or at school;
 - something your child learned or did that made you proud; or
 - an up-coming event or visit that your child is excited about.

Over →

Who can I talk to if I have more questions?

Call Your Health Connection, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. or visit our website



Tel: 705-721-7520
Toll free: 1-877-721-7520
www.simcoemuskokahealth.org

Your Health Connection

- **Take your child's attention away from the needle with activities or toys.**

Children can: play with a toy, stuffed animal, pop-up book, or game; listen to music or watch a handheld device or movie.

Parents can: sing a favorite song or read a favorite book to an infant, toddler or preschool child; or talk about things that are of interest or amusing to an older child.

- **Ask your child to take a deep breath.** Deep breathing reduces the pain from a needle and a child's distress during immunization.

- Practice counting and breathing deeply and slowly.
- Just before the needle, take out a windmill, party blower or bottle of bubbles and ask your child to take a deep breath and blow on the object.
- Tell an older child to take a deep breath at the time the needle is given, and blow the "sting of the needle away".

- **Praise and reward your child.** After the needle, tell your child he/she did well. Positive recognition and rewards after the procedure such as stickers or certificates help a child feel good about the skills they learned during the procedure.

- **Acetaminophen** (e.g. Tylenol®, Tempra®) **or ibuprofen** (e.g. Motrin®, Advil®)

- These medications are not recommended for use *before* your child receives a needle.
- They can be used *afterwards* for minor reactions such as fever, irritability or a sore arm.
- Use these medications as directed by your doctor.
- Ibuprofen is not recommended for infants under 6 months of age.

- **Tell your child about the vaccine.**

- Describe what will happen and how it will feel.
- Do not tell your child that it won't hurt.
- Instead say the pain lasts a short time and feels like a "sting", "poke" or "squeeze".
- School age children can be told at home before visiting the doctor.
- Tell toddlers and preschoolers just before receiving the vaccine.

- **Answer your child's questions.**

- Why do I need a vaccine? ("To help you stay healthy.")
- What will happen? ("The medicine will be put in your arm with a needle.")
- How will it feel? ("You may feel a poke or small sting that will last a few seconds.")

**** This resources was adapted with Permission of Toronto Public Health*