



Updated: December 13, 2021

## COVID-19 INFORMATION

# Vaccination Tips for Parents and Caregivers

It's normal for some children – and adults – to have anxiety or fear about needles. Here are some tips to help make their vaccination a better experience for everyone.

### Language Tips

Use simple and positive language before, during and after immunization.

You can use this as a guide (for yourself) and for those who you are supporting.

#### Always

- Offer words of encouragement and a calm and confident presence
- Focus on what they can do to make their immunization experience more comfortable
- Support healthy and realistic discussion on the immunization experience, and focus on what helpful strategies can be used
- Focus on what went well – highlight 1 to 2 things that were positive during the experience
- Correct any exaggerated memories about the experience to be more realistic and redirect to what went well
- Say “did a great job” and/or “they were brave!”
- Re-frame memories in a positive way! This leads to a more positive and confident experience the next time

#### Avoid

- Pain descriptors
- Saying “It will be over soon” or “it will be OK”
- Discussing your own needle fear in front of your child or person you are supporting. If they ask, be honest and positive: “I get nervous about needles sometimes, but they’re important for my health! That’s why I do X, Y, and Z to make me feel better. It gets a bit easier every time



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### Before Immunization

- **Giving your child Tylenol or Advil before they receive their vaccine is not recommended**
- If a child seems afraid of needles, you can say: “You seem nervous, a lot of kids feel that way, and we can do this together.”
- Offer hope and comfort strategies. You can say: “We’ll do some deep breathing together to help you feel safe and comfortable.”
- Talk about what’s worked well in the past and build on it
- Avoid dismissing the child’s fears or anxiety by saying “you’re okay” or “your fears can’t be that bad.” Instead say: “If you are feeling nervous, take some slow, deep breaths and see how it makes you feel so much calmer.”
- Bring a favourite toy or stuffy for comfort, and plan to do something fun and interesting after the appointment to celebrate making healthy decisions
- Call your local vaccine clinic ahead of time for strategies to improve your child’s experience
- Apply numbing cream 30-90 minutes before getting the shot
  - A variety of numbing creams and numbing patches are available at your local pharmacy. Make sure you ask your pharmacist for assistance to ensure you purchase the right product
  - Numbing cream will **not** be offered at the Vaccine Clinic. Please ensure you have applied the numbing cream to your child’s arm prior to the appointment

### During Immunization

- Avoid predicting the child’s feeling or pain by saying “It’s just a little pinch, pain or hurt.” Instead say: I don’t know how it will feel for you, but when you use deep breaths and other things we talked about, it may not bother you as much
- Make sure your child feels relaxed. Try a breathing exercise to tense their muscles like a robot and then let them loose like spaghetti noodles
- Invite the child to do something to distract themselves: Let’s play your favorite game on the iPad, tell a story, or hug your toy
- Focus on what is going well and the strategy they are using: You are doing a great job of keeping your arm still and your body calm
- Have older children sit up instead of lying down
- Have children tap their toes, alternating left foot, then right foot. Challenge them to do it to the beat of a favourite song.

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### After Immunization

- You may give your child Tylenol after they receive their vaccine to relive some pain, **but not before**
- Praise the child for what they did well: “You did a great job distracting yourself and relaxing your arm.”
- Avoid apologizing; it can imply harm by saying “I’m sorry.” Instead say: “You did a really great job. You are brave.”
- Go do something fun and interesting. This will be a welcome distraction, and will help reinforce that the needle is a very quick moment, and we should celebrate taking care of our bodies.

## Celebrate your Vaccination Day!

Kids in the Northwest Territories have been greatly affected by COVID-19 and will remember the pandemic for years to come. Find a way to make their vaccine day special, in a way that works for the family.

### Let’s celebrate our children becoming **vaccine heroes** for our Territory!

- Ask the doctor or nurse if they’d like to be in a photo congratulating your child on doing a great job!
- Stop by for a special treat on the way home
- Plan a family movie night
- Bake cookies together
- Plan to do fun crafts or an art project
- Do your favourite things together like bowling, skating, or a bonfire
- Enjoy dinner at your favourite restaurant
- Have a safe in-person visit with your child’s friends or family
- Go sledding
- Relax with a book
- Read the Arctic Vaccinator comic book together and explain to your child how they are a vaccine hero!
- Colour the Arctic Vaccinator colouring page and submit it to win a prize!



For more information, please visit [www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19](http://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19)