

Preparing your child for a COVID-19 vaccine

Talk to your child ahead of time

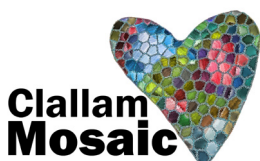
Depending on your child's ability to understand and express language, caregivers should try to explain the reason for the shot, what to expect at each step and perhaps even do a practice run with the child.

Many kids with disabilities have already faced isolation, changes to their routines, and disruptions to their therapeutic care and education. The process of getting a vaccination is an added challenge, especially since many times the shots aren't being given in a typical doctor's office setting.

Try the CARD system

This system can be customized to each child, starting with identifying the exact source of anxiety when it comes to getting a shot. Use some or all the steps below, but also take the time to explain to your child how important their action is to keep themselves and others safe. The right frame of mind can go a long way to alleviating fears.

C OMFORT	<i>What makes your child feel most comfortable?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Holding someone's hand?• Wearing comfy clothes?• Sitting a certain way?• Numbing cream?• Soothing arm rub?		
A SK	<i>Worry can make fear worse. When we don't feel like we know what's going on, we get scared.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let your child ask questions.• Answer them as honestly as possible.• Ask the health care professional to talk through the process. <i>The more they know about what to expect, the better.</i>		
R ELAX	<i>Positive self-talk:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I can do this!• I am brave!	<i>Positive talk from a parent or caregiver:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It will be over soon.• What you're doing is keeping you and other people safe.• You're doing great!	<i>Additional techniques:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Belly breaths.• Focus on lowering your heart rate.
D ISTRACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play a game on a cell phone.• Play with a fidget toy.• Listen to music.• Look at a book.• Do some drawing.• Focus on details around the room.		



For more information: CovidVaccineWA.org

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Share a social story

There are several visual explainers and social stories that you can share with your child to prepare them for their COVID vaccination.

Autism Society of America

www.covid19.autism-society.org/

Autism Services, Education Resources, Training Collaborative

paautism.org/resource/covid-19-vaccine-social-stories/ (Available in English and Spanish)

Center for Dignity and Healthcare for People with Disabilities

pathfindersforautism.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Social-Story_Getting-the-COVID19-Vaccine.pdf

Ask the vaccine provider for accommodations

Contact the vaccine provider to ask if they can make some of the following accommodations to support your child.

- Schedule a longer appointment time to ensure your child feels comfortable.
- Allow your child to be vaccinated in your vehicle.
- Meet you at the door to assist you and decrease your wait time.
- Vaccinate your child in a private space away from others, and provide sensory modifications to help your child (softer lighting, minimizing touch, eliminating sounds).
- Explain all the steps in the process before they start.

It's a good idea to call ahead before booking an appointment at a pharmacy. Not all pharmacies will vaccinate children.

Try stress-relieving techniques while your child is receiving their vaccine

BREATHE

Show your child how to breathe slowly in through their nose and out through their mouth. Do this together: count to four for each in-breath and each out-breath.

1. **Breathe in** through your nose for one...two...three...four,
2. **Hold** for one...two...three...four,
3. **Breathe out** through your mouth for one...two...three...four,
4. **Repeat.**

DISTRACT

Talk to your child about something they're really interested in.
Have your child describe the small details they see around them.
Talk with your child about something you know they are looking forward to.

Play with a sensory item like a squeeze ball, pop-it toy or even a stuffed animal.

ASK QUESTIONS

Allow your child to take the time they need to communicate a question, concern, or thought.

If they appear frustrated or worried, encourage them to take some breaths and speak slowly.

Remind them that the vaccine provider wants to help and can answer their questions.

Other resources and techniques

- Use a social story in advance of the vaccine appointment to walk your child through the steps (see examples from [University of Cincinnati](#) or [UC Davis](#)).
- Buy unique bandages in fun shapes for your child to choose from after the shot.
- Bring a snack for afterward.
- If your child has a service animal, allow them to accompany your child to the appointment.



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