

## Helping children get ready for COVID shots

The recent announcement that Pfizer COVID vaccine has now been approved for children age 5-11 comes with many mixed feelings in parents. The Prince Edward family health team and [www.PEFHT.ca](http://www.PEFHT.ca) have many resources to help answer questions that parents, and children may have. For specific advice about your child, it is best to talk with your doctor.

However, many parents are eager to get their children vaccinated, hoping to make it safer to see friends and family over the holidays. Many children also want to get vaccinated so they can worry less and get back to some normal activities. They just wish it didn't involve that sharp, pokey thing. While no one really likes getting shots, there are a lot of things that can help make the process less stressful for everyone. At our local vaccine clinic, we working to keep things as stress free as possible. With the help of our community, we will also be running some special Kids Only clinics. However, there are a lot of things parents can also do before, during and after, that make a difference.

While the COVID vaccines are not painful, there is still a poke. A fear of needles and feeling stressed and anxious makes the experience seem much worse and can cause lasting anxiety. Kids don't like surprises and they worry less when they know what to expect. Telling them the day before should give them enough but not too much time to prepare. Distraction is the best way to manage worry, so encourage children to something fun to do while sitting and waiting. Younger children may also want to bring a favorite stuffy, blanket or other familiar object. Talk about what to wear, where to sit, which arm to use and what you are going to do afterwards to help focus on the process and not the needle. If they ask, tell them that they may feel a quick poke or a pinch and then practice taking deep breaths to blow the pain away. Don't tell them it won't hurt.

If your child is very anxious or has had bad experiences with needles you may want to buy a numbing cream like emla, ametop or maxilene from the pharmacy. This needs to be put on 30 -60 minutes before you get to the clinic, so ask the pharmacist to show you where to put it.

Hugs, cuddles, holding hands and taking 10 deep breaths are all positive ways to help you child keep still during the shot. Curious children may want to watch, others do better if their attention is focused on you or another distraction. Plan something a little fun for afterward – a small treat, a favorite show or other activity. Getting kids to focus on what went well, will help make their next shot easier.

If your child has special needs, let your doctor or vaccination clinic know so we can try to make suitable arrangements.

To be fully protected, children will need to come back for a second shot, so we need to make the first one as positive as possible.

Kristin Morrison, M.D., F.R.C.P.C. (Pediatrics)