

Helping Comfort your child when they are getting a flu vaccine

Did you know YOU can help needle sticks (pokes) be less scary and hurt less, too? Here are lots of ideas!

Use distraction

The brain usually thinks about one thing at a time. So if the brain is really thinking about something else, it may not “feel” pain or fear a poke. The more the child’s mind is consumed or engaged in the distraction, the less pain. Some forms of distraction are:

- Counting
- Looking for a picture in a seek and find book , like **Where’s Waldo** or **I Spy**
- Playing with a toy that fully captures the child’s attention
- Playing a video or hand held game
- Having an engaging conversation
- Going on a fantasy trip somewhere and paying attention to what you see, smell, hear and do there
- Taking slow, deep breaths in through the mouth and out through lips
- Singing/listening to favorite or engaging music

What if my child is too young for distraction?

Special things that help babies are:

- Pacifier dipped in a sugar water 2 minutes before the poke
- Breastfeeding during a poke
- Swaddling the baby; giving babies boundaries
- Soft music and controlled lighting and noise

Use a comfort position

Older babies and children feel more in control and less helpless when upright during a poke (instead of lying down). Also, having physical contact with their parent is calming and reassuring. Examples are:

- Sit chest to chest with your child or hold your baby over your shoulder giving your child a hug during the poke
- Have your child sit in your lap with your child's back to you. Give your child a hug during the poke holding onto hands/legs
- Some kids like to sit so they can watch some or all of the time, and some do not

Ask your Pediatrician for pain relief measures

- **Buzzy** looks like a bee and vibrates. During a poke, the vibrations are “felt” by the brain instead of pain. The Buzzy also has a cold pack (wings) that can be used to decrease pain.
- **Numbing cream** is a medicine put on the skin like a lotion. It is called **LMX4**. The lotion is put on 30 minutes or more before the poke. Numbing cream has lidocaine. Tell the nurse if your child has an allergy to lidocaine. Lidocaine makes the spot of the poke feel numb.
- **Pain ease** is a very cold spray that helps numb the skin before a needle stick. It is a great option for kids old enough to understand why something very cold is sprayed on their skin. The spray makes that spot numb instantly and lasts up to a minute.

Choose your words carefully

Knowing what to say can be hard. Use “kids’ speak”. Here are some ideas:

- A poke: “A small needle just under your skin”
- An IV: “A plastic little tube to that helps give your body a drink and some medicine”
- A child’s vein: “Little tubes or tunnels that take your blood through your body”
- A tourniquet: “A hug for your arm”

- An alcohol prep pad: “A tiny washcloth for your arm”
- An immunization (shot): “A special shield to protect your body from getting sick”

Be a great coach!

Adults can be a coach or helper during a poke. Here are a few tips:

- Be aware of your own voice tone and facial expressions. Your child will pick up on your feelings. Stay positive.
- Keep your child focused on what they should do, “You are doing a great job blowing bubbles”. Counting 1, 2, 3, or deep breathing help the child have control.
- Speak in a calm, quiet manner. Sometimes, a child may begin to cry. Try saying, “I know this is hard for you. Thank you for holding still.”
- Avoid saying “Be a big girl/boy now”, “Almost done”, or “No crying.” Instead re-focus on the distraction “Let’s find Waldo” or what the child should do.
- Recognize bravery and name the things they did well, like holding still, counting, looking at the book.

Talk to your nurse, doctor

- Make sure to tell us what has worked well in the past
- Controlling needle pain with the very first poke is important to prevent fear of needles
- Please let us know how we can help!

[Helping your child with a needle stick | University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital \(uichildrens.org\)](https://www.uichildrens.org/parents/needle-stick)