

# IWK HEALTH COVID-19 VACCINE TOOLKIT



*"We will do everything possible to prevent and treat pain."*



## What is a COVID-19 vaccine toolkit?

- This toolkit contains resources for parents and caregivers of children aged 5 to 11 years who will be receiving their COVID-19 vaccine.
- Each resource is intended to help your child before, during, and after their appointment. Using this toolkit will provide you with ways to reduce your child's needle-associated fears and pain.
- In 2021, IWK Health began an evidence-based program called ***The Comfort Promise***.
- The Comfort Promise is the IWK's commitment to *"do everything possible to prevent and treat pain."*
- Research shows that if you use the resources in this toolkit, your child may:
  - have less pain now and in the future
  - learn healthy practices that can help well into the future
- You can find out more information about each resource on the "Additional Resources" page at the end of this toolkit.

# IT DOESN'T HAVE TO HURT: WHY WE CARE ABOUT PREVENTING AND TREATING NEEDLE PAIN IN PEDIATRICS



## WHAT CHILDREN SAY

Children say needles are their number one healthcare fear. Our children's fears are real. They should be handled carefully. Fears can affect children long-term.



## WHAT PARENTS SAY

As health care providers, we'll do everything possible to relieve children's pain. Parents trust we will strive to meet their expectations. We have a responsibility to provide care that follows best practices.



## TAKE THE TIME

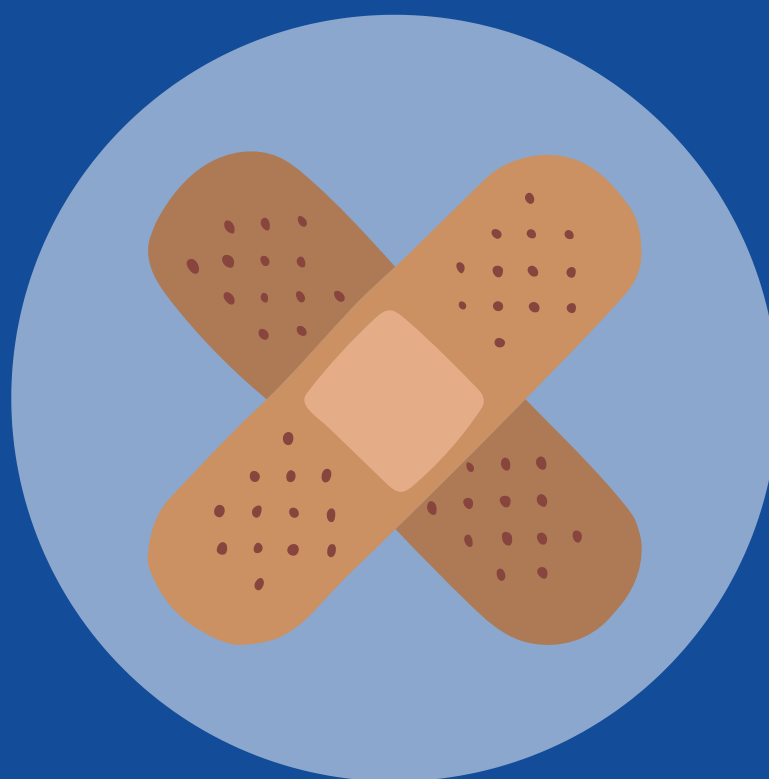
There is evidence that when a child is getting a vaccine, you can lessen their pain by using:

- positive language
- comfort positioning
- distraction
- numbing cream



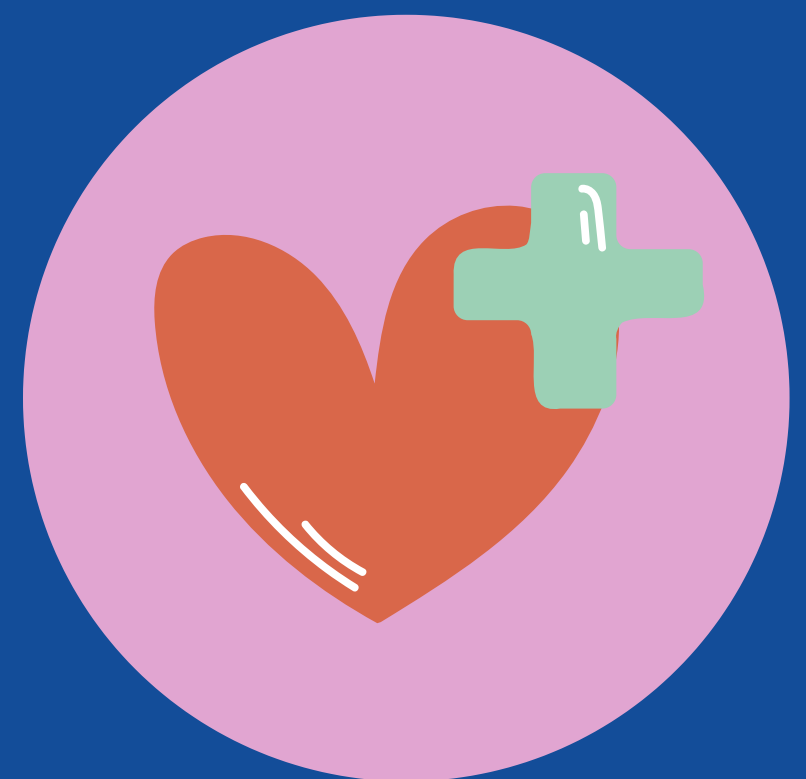
## MEMORY

Memory is a powerful tool for how a child experiences future pain. The use of positive language can reframe a child's memory of their vaccine. It can change how children recall the experience.



## PHYSICAL RESPONSES

Untreated needle pain may increase future sensitivity to pain. It can lead to the development of pre-procedural anxiety and/or phobias of needles. This fear can persist throughout life.



## PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE PRACTICES

Children who have unrelieved pain in the health care setting may be less likely to seek preventive health care. They may be less likely to adhere to recommended vaccination schedules.

# MANAGING NEEDLE PAIN: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

1.

**Be Self-Aware.** If you are feeling anxious, try to remain calm when discussing the vaccine with your child before, during, and after the injection. Parental/caregiver anxiety can lead to a child having a more distressing health care experience. Be a calm, supportive role model for your child. Be aware of your body language and tone of voice. If you remain calm, your child will have a better experience.



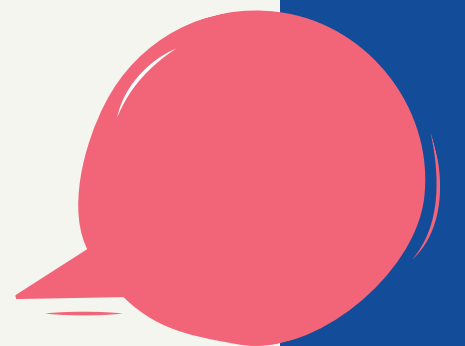
2.

**Prepare Your Child.** Tell your child what to expect. This could be days, hours, or minutes before their vaccine. Tell them what you will both do to make the experience as positive as possible. Remind them of things they have handled in the past. Explain each person's role during their vaccine. **Example:** "Your job is to stay very still. My job is to hold your hand. The nurse's job is to give you your vaccine."



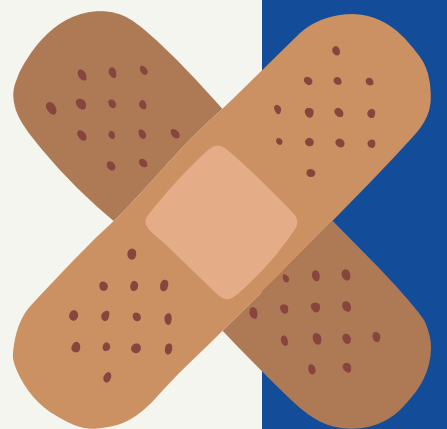
3.

**Language.** The words you use are important. Highlight what they are doing well. Stay positive. **Example:** "You are doing a great job holding still." Use words to help distract your child. Tell stories, make silly sounds, sing songs. Be creative! Avoid saying things like, "I know," "I'm sorry," or "It's almost over." These phrases may cause distress. They may increase a child's feeling of pain.



4.

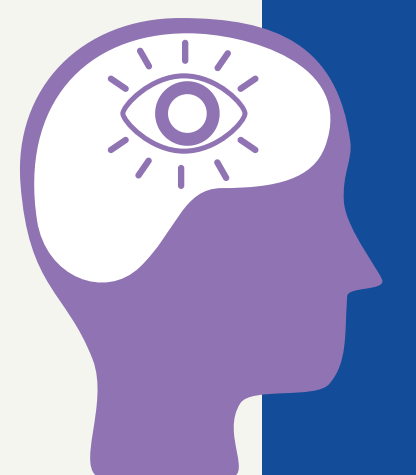
**Comfort Promise.** Ask your pharmacist about a numbing cream and apply it to your child's arm before their vaccine. Bring toys/electronics for distraction. Have your child sit on your lap. Hold your child's hand. Give your child options for how they may like to be seated when possible. Before your child's vaccine, talk about these techniques with them. They they will know what to expect.



5.

**Memory.** Your child's pain is influenced by the way we speak about it. By highlighting what went well, you can create more positive memories of the injection. This can help make their next vaccine go well. Remind your child of the good things that happened to strengthen their positive memories. Have the ending be a positive experience for the child.

**Example:** After the vaccine, give your child a small treat (like a sticker).





# LANGUAGE GUIDE: HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT VACCINES

Studies show how we speak to children about vaccines impacts their appointment. Our words may also affect how easy or hard they'll find future vaccinations.

This is a guide for how you can talk to your child about vaccines before, during, and after their appointment.

## BEFORE

### **EXPLAIN WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN:**

"You will sit on a chair or you can sit on my lap. You will roll up your sleeve and we can watch a show on the tablet/squeeze your favourite toy/sing a song, etc. while you get your vaccine."  
It is normal to feel nervous. It is okay to feel uncertain.

### **USE NEUTRAL & GENTLE WORDS:**

Instead of "shot" you can say "poke".  
Use words like, "You may feel something scratchy," or "Your arm may be sore afterwards."  
Words that should be avoided are: "Sting", "Owie", "Hurt", and "Pain".

### **EXPLAIN EACH PERSON'S ROLE:**

"The nurse/pharmacist/care provider is going to give you your vaccine."  
"Mom or Dad is going to hold your hand."  
"Your job is to tell us how you feel, hold your arm still, etc."

### **"WILL IT HURT?":**

If your child asks, "*Will it hurt?*" you can say, "I don't know exactly what you're going to feel, but if you use the things we have planned for, it won't bother you so much. Maybe you can tell me what it felt like when we're done." Ask them after how it felt.



## DURING

### **ENCOURAGE & PRAISE YOUR CHILD:**

"You are doing a fantastic job holding still."  
"Awesome job asking questions."  
"Thank you for using your words."  
"I am proud of how you are handling this."

### **USE NEUTRAL WORDS:**

"Here we go" instead of "Here comes the pinch." Warning words can cause distress. Even the faces we make when saying warning words are important. They can convey a negative meaning.

### **AVOID THESE COMMON SAYINGS:**

"I'm sorry."  
"I know."  
"Almost over."  
"Don't worry."

These can cause more distress in a child. They are often false reassurances.

### **USE A CALM SPEAKING VOICE:**

Children respond more positively when their parent/caregiver remains calm. Use your normal speaking voice during the vaccine.



## AFTER

### **FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES:**

There are many positives to speak about! Some examples are: the kind health care provider, a distraction item you used, the sticker they received. Maybe you did something fun after like go to a playground.

### **BE REALISTIC:**

Ask a child "How did that feel?" Validate their feelings. If they exaggerate, you can reframe and be realistic. Example: "Yes, you cried a bit and also, you were very brave holding still."

### **REMIND YOUR CHILD HOW BRAVE THEY WERE:**

This will boost their confidence. Tell them how brave it was when they held out their arm. Or how well they focused on the distraction item (for example, toy or book).

### **MEMORY:**

By focusing on the positive, it will help your child have a more positive memory of the experience. This will help your child be less scared next time.



# NUMBING CREAM: A METHOD TO REDUCE NEEDLE PAIN

## What is numbing cream?

- Numbing cream is a medicine that is put on the skin to reduce pain and discomfort from vaccines and other needle pokes. It comes as a cream or a patch.
- There are several types of numbing creams. Ask your care provider or pharmacist if you are unsure which one is right for your child.



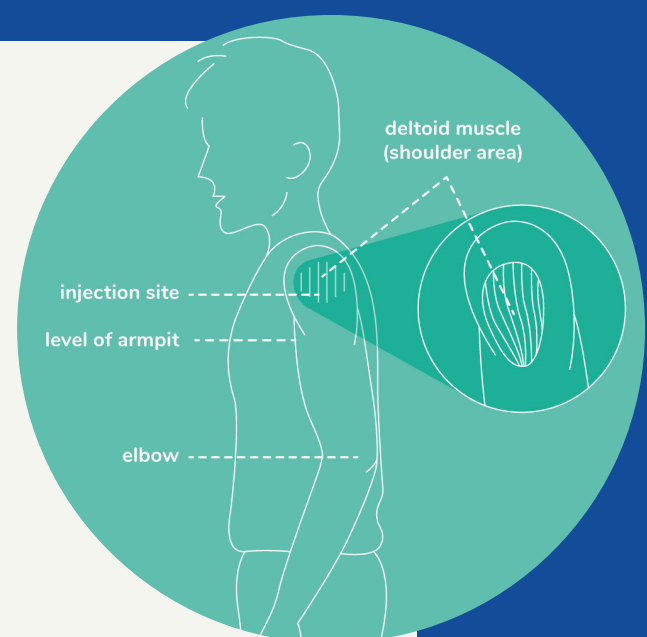
## Where can I get it?

- Numbing creams are available for purchase over-the-counter at nearly all pharmacies.
- You can call ahead and request the numbing cream from your local pharmacist and they should be able to fulfill your request within 24 hours. This may vary on weekends.
- Speak with your pharmacist about the product you are selecting.



## How do I apply it?

- The cream or patch must be applied 30 to 60 minutes before the vaccine. Read the product instructions before using.
- Follow the directions for the amount of cream to apply. This is based on your child's age and the product you are using.
- The cream or patch should be placed on your child's upper arm where the vaccine will go. You should avoid any areas of broken skin.



## Ask Your Care Provider.

- Always speak with your care provider before using any medication.
- When used as directed, numbing creams are safe and have few side effects.
- You may notice a whitening or reddening of the skin. This is common.
- Less commonly, a rash, swelling, or hives may develop. These side effects may be signs of an allergy. Remove the cream immediately and notify your care provider.
- Some children may not be able to use numbing creams. Tell your health care provider before using numbing cream if your child has:
  - Open areas of the skin
  - Kidney or liver disease
  - Sensitivity or allergy to anesthetics
  - G6PD deficiency
  - Congenital/idiopathic methemoglobinemia





# DISTRACTION AND POSITIONING GUIDE FOR CHILDREN AGED 5 TO 11 YEARS

## UPRIGHT IS BEST



Using a comfort position can help your child feel more in control. They feel safer and more supported, are less likely to have pain, and are more likely to remain cooperative during their appointment. Sitting up is typically the best position for a child when receiving a vaccine.

**Speak with your care provider:** There are alternatives to sitting upright if this is not the best position for your child.

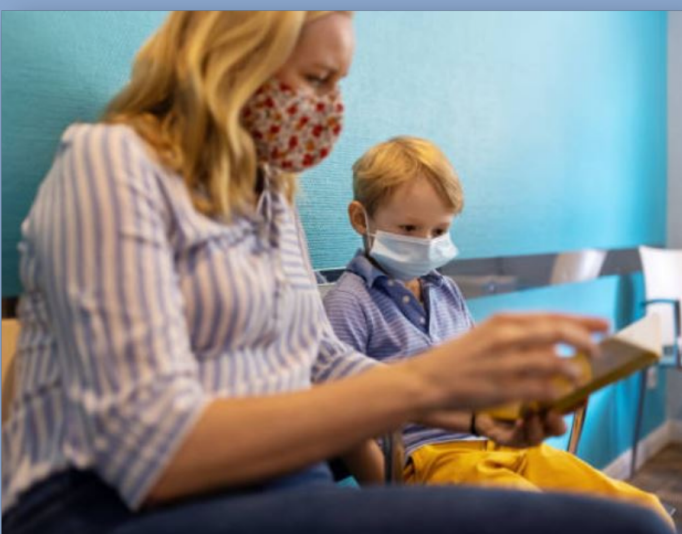
## HELD BY PARENT OR CAREGIVER



Children want to be comforted by their parent or caregiver. Allowing them to sit on your lap or holding their hand gives your child physical and emotional support. Ask your care provider to help both of you find a comfortable position during your child's appointment so that you can remain nearby.

**Remember:** As your child's trusted adult, keeping your body language calm will help ease your child's fears.

## DISTRACTION



Distracting your child during their vaccine is a proven way to help ease anxiety and pain. Ask your child what toy or item they'd like to bring to their appointment.

**Examples:** A favourite toy, a video or app shown on a tablet or phone, books, I Spy pages, breathing techniques, fidget spinners, pop-its.

You know your child best. Speak with your care provider about other techniques that may benefit your child.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

To book your child's COVID-19 vaccine in Nova Scotia, or to learn more about the vaccine, please visit the IWK and NS Health booking page.

Access here: [tiny.url/novascotiacanimmunize](https://tiny.url/novascotiacanimmunize)



If you want to read more about the information contained in the IWK COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit please visit the links below:



#### **IWK Health**

Vaccination resources for Youth and Families on COVID-19 vaccine safety, needle phobias, and how to talk about vaccination.

Access here: [tiny.url/iwkhealth](https://tiny.url/iwkhealth)



#### **Children's Healthcare Canada**

COVID-19 and Kids: How to immunize children with confidence.

Access here: [tiny.url/chcc](https://tiny.url/chcc)



#### **Solutions for Kids in Pain (SKIP)**

Resources for families & health professionals about needle pain management for vaccinations.

Access here: [tiny.url/SKIP](https://tiny.url/SKIP)



#### **Pain, Education, Advocacy, Knowledge (PEAK)**

Research by Dr. Melanie Noel on the power of memory and the experience of pain.

Access here: [tiny.url/PEAK](https://tiny.url/PEAK)



#### **Canadian Paediatric Society**

Information for parents from Canada's paediatricians about the COVID-19 vaccine for children and youth.

Access here: [tiny.url/cps](https://tiny.url/cps)



#### **Immunize Canada**

COVID-19 Information for the public with tips on how to prepare for your COVID-19 vaccine.

Access here: [tiny.url/immunizecanada](https://tiny.url/immunizecanada)



#### **It Doesn't Have to Hurt**

A patient-oriented research program in children's pain management lead by Dr. Christine Chambers.

Access here: [tiny.url/itdoesnthavetohurt](https://tiny.url/itdoesnthavetohurt)



#### **Public Health Agency of Canada**

Expert information on vaccines for COVID-19 with FAQs, vaccine safety reports, and data on COVID-19 vaccines.

Access here: [tiny.url/publichealthagency](https://tiny.url/publichealthagency)