

Preparing children for school vaccinations:

A parent's guide

Immunizing your child at school is convenient and effective. Vaccines are medicines that teach the body to recognize germs that cause diseases. If the body comes in contact with the germs in the future, it will be able to stop them.

Most vaccines are given with a needle. This can be painful or scary for some children and may discourage them from getting vaccinated. Use this factsheet to help prepare your child for an vaccination. It includes information about what to expect and how to be ready.

Talk to your child about...

- What will happen: “You will get a vaccine to keep you healthy. The vaccine goes in your arm with a needle.”
- How the needle will feel: “There may be a pinch, some pushing or pressure for a few seconds. It bothers some kids, but others think it is OK.”
- How your child can increase comfort using the **CARD** system (**C**omfort, **A**sk, **R**elax, **D**istract): “The nurse will do some things so that the needle doesn't bother you. You can do some things too. Use the **CARD** system. We can practise at home.”

The CARD system

Comfort

- Your child can sit upright during the needle and relax the arm.

Ask

- Ask your child how to make the needle more comfortable. For example, does your child want to...
 - bring a friend or a trusted adult with them?
 - get the needle in a private room?
 - use numbing creams or patches? These are medicines that parents can buy at the pharmacy without a prescription. They dull the pain where the needle enters the skin. They take some time to work, so plan ahead. Contact your local public health nurse for more information.

Relax

- Your child can take deep belly breaths before, during and after the needle. This is like blowing up a balloon or blowing out candles. The belly should move out when breathing in and move in when breathing out.

Distract

- Your child can talk to someone or bring an object to get their mind off the needle (for example, music, game or book). Some children like to look at the needle – this is OK too. Your child can let the nurse know their preferences.



Prepare your child...

- Sign the permission form with your child and return it to the school. Your child will be asked to agree again on the day of vaccination.
- Work with your child, public health department and school if you have any questions or if you are using strategies from the **CARD** system that require planning (such as privacy, numbing creams or patches).
- To find more resources and watch videos visit www.aboutkidshealth.ca/CARD



Tips for your child on vaccination day...

- Try to eat something before vaccination and afterwards.
- Wear short sleeves or something easy to pull up so that the upper arm can be reached easily.
- Use the **CARD** system to make needles more comfortable: **C**omfort, **A**sk, **R**elax, **D**istract.
- Bring any supplies you need, such as something to distract the mind or numbing cream.
- Be calm and positive and help other children who might be nervous.
- Do not tense your arm where the needle is going in – keep it loose or jiggly (like cooked spaghetti).
- If your child feels faint or gets dizzy during needles tell them:
 - You can sit and tense your leg and stomach muscles until you feel warm in the face like you are blushing (10–15 seconds). To help do this you can put a ball between your legs and then squeeze your legs together. Then, you can release the muscle back to normal for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat this five times.

What can you expect after the needle?

- Sometimes there are minor side effects like pain, swelling or redness of the arm. This is normal and does not last very long (a few minutes to a few days). It should not prevent your child from doing any activities.
- If you notice a change in your child’s health that worries you, contact your healthcare provider or public health department.

For more information, talk to your public health nurse.

