

Protecting Our Children

Protecting Our Community

# Injections:

## How to make them easier for your child

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### **Kids dread shots. Here's how to make injections easier.**

Most babies and toddlers receive up to 20 shots by their second birthday, and kids with health conditions such as allergies, asthma or diabetes have far more experiences with needles and doctors. It's no surprise that needle sticks and shots are the things kids often fear most when they need to see the doctor.

Many kids are so scared of shots that they become highly distressed the moment they see a needle. Once your child is all worked up, he or she is unlikely to calm down before the injection. You can anticipate your child's distress and take steps to reduce it before you even reach the doctor's office.

### **When infants get shots**

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to stay calm and collected. Although babies can't talk, they do sense fear and anxiety, especially in their parents. Your anxiety fuels your baby's insecurity and fear. If you feel yourself becoming anxious, take deep breaths and relax your muscles.

#### **Other strategies include:**

- ★ Bring a familiar and soothing object. Your baby's favorite stuffed animal or blanket will serve as a comforting distraction.
- ★ Hold and talk to your child during a shot. Comfort your baby with hugs and caresses. Your voice also helps your baby feel secure, so softly sing a familiar song or whisper reassuring words.
- ★ Offer a pacifier or bottle.

### **Preparing older children for shots**

Once children can talk, you can explain how shots protect them. Because shots hurt, children often assume they are harmful or even a form of punishment. Make sure your child understands that needles are the only way to get certain medicine inside the body to prevent illness. Never let your child talk his or her way out of getting a shot.

Be honest and tell your child that the shot will probably hurt. Emphasize that it will probably last only a few seconds.

Children who know that they're going to get a shot generally do much better than children who aren't told in advance. Wait until the day of the appointment to mention the shot. If you bring it up days before the event, your child may worry obsessively about it. It's even OK to share the information right before you go into the doctor's office.

If you promise your child there will be no shots and then learn during the visit that one is needed, you've created a conflict. Instead say, "The doctor will tell us, but I am not aware of any needed shots."



## **Distraction techniques**

Reading aloud, talking or watching a video are all good waiting-room distractions. Just before the injection, you might ask your child to:

- ★ Take a deep breath and blow during the injection. Some parents even provide a party noisemaker.
- ★ Count out loud during the shot — you might say “by the time you count to five, the shot will likely be done.”
- ★ Squeeze your hand as hard as the shot hurts.

## **Crying is OK**

Most children cry after injections. It’s their way of dealing with it. So don’t make your child feel bad about crying. After the injection, praise your child: “You did a really good job.” You may even want to do something special with your child as a reward for good behavior at the doctor.

## **Common side effects of shots**

Some shots, particularly immunizations, cause minor, temporary side effects, such as a mild fever or sore arm. To minimize these effects, you can give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) before or after a shot. Follow the label instructions for the correct dose.

You can also use an ice pack on the injection site to reduce redness and swelling. If you’re concerned that your child might be having a serious reaction related to an immunization, contact your doctor as soon as possible or seek emergency care.

## **Part of growing up**

Most people, regardless of age, don’t like to get shots. Adults typically submit to injections because they realize the benefit of the medication is worth the tiny prick of pain. With your help, your children will learn how to do this, too.

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