



# TIPS for Children with **NEEDLE-PHOBIA**

## A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Many children experience fear or anxiety around needles. This can make the immunisation process stressful for both children and parents. However, with a little preparation and support, you can help your child overcome their needle-phobia and get the important vaccinations they need.

### *Before the appointment*



- **Talk to your child:** Explain the importance of vaccinations and how they help keep them healthy. Use simple language and avoid phrases that might sound scary, like "shot" or "jab." You can try saying "vaccine" or "a little pinch that helps you stay strong."
- **Prepare your child:** Let your child know what to expect at the appointment. Show them pictures of the healthcare provider's office and the needle they will receive. Practice counting to three together, as this can help them anticipate the quick pinch.
- **Pack distractions:** Bring along your child's favourite toys, books, games, or music to help them relax and distract themselves during the appointment.
- **Get in touch with your healthcare provider:** Talk to your healthcare provider about pain management options that can help to reduce the discomfort of the injection. You might also like to discuss limiting the number of injections to one per visit.
- **Make it a positive experience:** Reward your child for their bravery after the appointment. This could be a small treat, a sticker, or simply your praise and encouragement.
- **Get in early:** Where possible, try to book the earliest appointment available to minimise an escalation of anxiety during the day.

### *During the appointment*



- **Stay calm and positive:** Your child will pick up on your emotions, so it's important to stay calm and reassuring.
- **Let your child take control:** Give your child choices whenever possible, such as which arm they want the injection in or what toy they want to hold.
- **Distract your child:** Help your child focus on something else while the injection is being administered. This could be singing a song, telling a story, or blowing bubbles.
- **Offer comfort:** Hold your child's hand or give them a hug. Let them know you are there for them and that it will be over soon.



# TIPS for Children with NEEDLE-PHOBIA

## After the appointment

- **Praise your child:** Acknowledge their bravery and let them know how proud you are of them.
- **Continue to talk about it:** If your child is still anxious about needles, continue to talk about it in a positive and reassuring way.



## Additional tips

- **Prepare for success:** Set realistic and achievable goals for practice and provide immediate rewards. These practice tasks could be as simple as visiting a pathologist clinic or looking at photos and rewards can be a mixture of affection, praise, material rewards or extra screen time. Fear of needles often develops between the ages of 3-6, so engaging in positive repeated exposure activities during this time can be really beneficial.
- **Let them watch you:** Don't shy away from conversations or opportunities to practice or to model positive medical experiences. Take them along with you for your own needles and be open about conversations without minimising the challenge that your children face.
- **Don't dismiss their feelings:** Try not to dismiss the anxiety your child is experiencing by saying "it won't hurt" or "you'll be fine". These are very difficult experiences for your child and it's best to be on their team and see it as a goal you're both working towards.
- **Create physical comfort:** Ensure a position of comfort with close contact to the parent/guardian, upright if appropriate to facilitate access to the required parts of the body without too much restriction. Swaddling and tucking in a warm blanket is encouraged for infants whilst forcible restraint is generally not recommended during medical procedures for children of any age. Massage, hugging, gentle tapping and stroking may also help build comfort.
- **Call ahead:** Call your immunisation provider ahead of time and ask what support they might be able to provide for children with needle-phobia.
- **Seek help:** Talk to a therapist if your child's fear of needles is severe.



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

**Melbourne Vaccine Education Centre** <https://mvec.mcri.edu.au/references/needle-phobia/>

**Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne** [https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Vaccination\\_and\\_needle\\_phobia/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Vaccination_and_needle_phobia/)

**Needle-phobia intervention program** <https://www.thehealthhub.org.au/needle-phobia-intervention-program/>

**NeedleCalm** <https://needlecalm.com.au/>

**Quiet Pathway NSW** <https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/news/articles/2021/11/quiet-pathway-gives-options-to-needle-phobic-kids>

**Buzzy Needle Pain Relief** <https://www.buzzy4shots.com.au/>

**Australian Psychological Society** <https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/psychology-topics/phobias>

**The Immunisation Foundation of Australia** <https://www.ifa.org.au/needle-phobia>

