



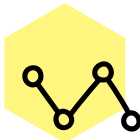
## A CARING APPROACH TO VACCINATING CHILDREN

*Children are rightfully often afraid of vaccinations. With the right preparation and support, however, these can take place with minimal pain and fear, in a climate of trust. The recommendations below can help facilitate this objective.*

### How to best prepare a child



Children will be much more willing to get vaccinated if you have first established a **connection with them**. Simple techniques are often enough to create a sense of curiosity and trust.



**Involve the child in making a joint plan.** What do they need for things to happen as smoothly as possible? Who does what?



**Be open and honest** with children about what is going to take place and explain things in neutral words, targeted at the desired outcome. For example, instead of saying, 'It'll be over in a second', say, 'I'm giving you this vaccine so that you stay healthy.'



**Every child experiences vaccines differently.** Some children feel brief pain, others feel pressure, or a tingling or tickling sensation. So don't tell them how the vaccination will feel ahead of time. Let them be the ones to tell you what they felt.



Parents and carers can use **helpful language** to help a child experience less pain, anxiety and stress. For example, 'The more relaxed your arm, the easier it'll be'. Scan the QR code on the back cover for more practical examples.

# Vaccination tips for healthcare professionals

## Make a connection



Non-verbal communication is a very important part of making a connection. Adjust your posture; respect the child's personal space and sit at the same height as the child. Listen carefully to what the child says and follow up by repeating some of their words back to them. Breaking the ice can start by making a descriptive comment about the text or cartoon on their shirt. This makes the child feel seen and heard, which builds trust. Then take the lead and ask, for example, what is the child's favourite thing to do.

## Talk through the plan



Talk the child through the plan. For example, how they'd like to sit, and the do's and don'ts of what they'd both like and are allowed to do. It's helpful to give them a choice of two options here. For example, 'Do you want to sit on your mother's lap or do you want to sit on your own chair?' Participating in decisions gives them a feeling of control and reduces anxiety. Helpful questions include: 'Do you or don't you want to look/know what we are going to do?', or 'Could you help me? If so, I need you to hold that bandage'. By giving a child a choice of two options or a task to complete, you give them a feeling of control.

## Distraction



What sort of distraction is helpful? Explain that your mind can only focus on one thing at a time and that you can use that to distract yourself ('just like you don't always hear your parents asking you to set the table when you're busy on your phone'). Bringing a favourite soft toy, picture book or game can help here.



Use a distraction technique appropriate to the child's development. Distraction works best when the child is really absorbed in what they are seeing, doing, or saying. Some examples are: looking at a search and find book, blowing bubbles, watching a film, counting, playing a game (like: 'I went on holiday and I took...').

## A calm environment



Breathing in and out calmly helps both children and their parents to feel calmer. Get children (and parents) to breathe in through their noses (to the count of three) and out through their mouths (to a further count of three). For example, young children can blow out imaginary candles. The calmer the breathing, the more relaxed the muscles which makes vaccination take place more easily.

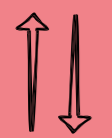


Give parents a job to do. For example: holding hands, giving a back rub, holding the bubble blower, blowing a windmill (with the child), chatting to their child about their last holidays, etc.



As a health professional, radiate calm and respect. Take care that only 1 person talks to the child. It's calmer that way.

## Language



Use a gentle voice and show genuine interest in the child. Use positive words to explain to the child how they can help. 'Make your arm heavy and then it will work', 'If you relax your arm, I can help you better', or 'let your muscles go limp like a piece of spaghetti, then it'll be easier'. See the QR code on the back cover for 'Helpful Language Use'.



Ask your doctor for an EMLA® or Rapydan prescription ahead of time to help with the local numbing of the skin.

## Numbing cream or plaster

It's possible to numb the vaccination spot in advance with a cream or plaster, for example **EMLA® / Rapydan®**. You can get these treatments from your GP.



**EMLA® must be applied at least 60 minutes ahead of time. Rapydan® must be applied at least 35 minutes ahead of time.**

## Buzzy

The feeling of the procedure can be reduced through the use of a **vibrating** device coupled with an **ice pack**, such as Buzzy®. The vibrations can reduce pain, or even stop it completely. First place the Buzzy on the injection spot for 1 minute and then slide it a few centimetres upwards.



## During the procedure



Make sure that **everything you need** (like syringes and needles) **is kept out of sight**. Keep the syringe out of the child's sight as far as possible during vaccination, unless the child has expressed the wish to watch. Do not announce that you are about to give the shot and do not count down to it, unless the child has specifically expressed in advance that this is what they want. **Insert the needle quickly**, don't pull back on the plunger, and inject the medicine slowly.

## Important considerations



**Physically forcing** children into non-emergency medical procedures **is not in their best interests** and violates the fundamental rights of the child. A need for force must be taken as a signal to stop the procedure and think up a comfortable alternative.



Organise the vaccination or other procedure set-ups in such a way that waiting children do not find themselves confronted with other children's negative experiences. **Provide them instead with an activity or distraction**, such as a television screen, a pleasant route that puts them at ease, or ideas on how to relax, like wiggling their toes or paying attention to their breathing while they wait.



**Highly anxious children** and children who struggle to cooperate, including ones with developmental delay or autism spectrum disorder, deserve a **different approach** and it is usually better to refer them on to care teams with specific expertise in procedural comfort. Initiatives have been launched at several Dutch hospitals to find comfortable ways of vaccinating children with needle phobia.

## Conclusion

After the injection, take the time to wrap up on a positive note, specifically mentioning what went well.

## Other important matters

### Helpful language

A brochure focused on helpful language for parents and healthcare professionals when counselling children has been created. It is available in several languages via the QR code provided.



### 'You are the master of your own mind'

Learn more about how pain works and what you can do to feel less pain.



Developed by the PROSA Knowledge Centre.



This was made possible by the Charlie Braveheart Foundation, Skills4Comfort and Kind&Ziekenhuis.



The PROSA Knowledge Centre is The Netherlands' leading institute for trauma-free paediatric care. It provides healthcare professionals with knowledge and skills training in pain and anxiety prevention, on the basis of scientific research. PROSA's recommendations are based on evidence-based scientific research and are supported by the Dutch Paediatric Association (NVK).