Addressing Vaccination Anxiety for Infants and Toddlers

Strategies for Parents and Caregivers



Infants and toddlers are often distressed by injections, leading some parents to dread, delay, or avoid vaccinations, even when they understand why they are so important. You can do simple things to help your child have a better vaccination experience while you protect them from serious diseases. For medical advice, please talk to your doctor.

Before the Visit

- **Pre-register** for your visit, if possible, so your wait time is shorter.
- **Know what to expect.** When setting up the visit, ask if vaccinations are expected. Do not reassure your child falsely. For example, don't promise your toddler "no shots today" if they may be needed.
- **Consider a numbing medicine that you can put on the skin.** It may be a 5% lidocaine cream, spray, or patch. This can help with injection pain. To take effect, these medicines need to be put on the skin 30 to 60 minutes ahead of time. Many clinics do not have time to do this. Consider asking the clinic or a pharmacist how to do this before you arrive, using a numbing medicine you can get without a prescription.[1]

During the Visit[2]

- **Ask questions** about the vaccination process so you feel prepared.
- **Breastfeeding, taking sugar water, or sucking on a pacifier while being held helps infants** with pain. Have the baby sucking before, during, and after vaccination. If not breastfeeding, you can use sugar water (1 teaspoon of white sugar dissolved with 2 teaspoons of water). Start giving sugar water 1 to 2 minutes before vaccination. Place a dropper into the side of the baby's mouth between the cheek and gums or dip the pacifier into the sugar water before giving it.
- **Hold your child.** After undressing the baby's limb(s) where the vaccine(s) will be given, hold the child on your lap during vaccination, either facing away from you or toward you.

  This should help the child stay still and feel secure but not be so tight that it increases distress. Rock the child after vaccination.[2]
- **Distraction** helps most infants and toddlers. You can use a mobile device, toys, or music.
- **Your words, tone, and attitude are important.** If the adults act and speak calmly and confidently, the child will feel reassured.[3]

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE ▶

Provided by GSK.
Adapted from https://www.immunize.org/wp-content/uploads/catg.d/p4272a.pdf on 03/03/2026. We thank Immunize.org.

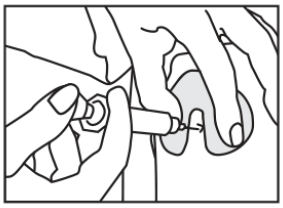
KEY IDEA

Let the person giving the vaccines know what helps your child feel calmer. They want to help!

Options for Making Shots Less Painful without Medicine

In addition to numbing medicines described in "Before the Visit," there are other ways to "distract" pain sensors in the skin so the child getting the vaccine won't notice it as much. Options include:

- The person giving the vaccine may use a **cold ("freezy") spray** just before injection.
- Before the injection, a **plastic device with several short, blunt contact points** can be placed on the skin around the injection site (one brand is pictured at right). This is nonprescription and inexpensive. You can clean and reuse it.



After the Visit

- Experts do not recommend giving pain medicines (such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen) before vaccination because they might lower the body's response to vaccines. You may use these medicines to help with pain or fever that develops after vaccination, if needed.[4]

References: 1. *Guide to Topical Anesthetics and Numbing Cream* from the Meg Foundation at www.megfoundationforpain.org/2022/7/22/topical-anesthetics-infographic/ **2.** *Reduce the Pain of Vaccination in Kids and Teens: A Guide for Parents* from Immunize Canada: https://caringforkids.cps.ca/uploads/handout_images/Pain-reduction-kids-and-teens.pdf **3.** *Improving the Vaccination Experience: What Health-Care Providers Say* from AboutKidsHealth (Canada) at assets.aboutkidshealth.ca/AKHassets/CARD_HCP_WhatYouCanSay.pdf?hub=cardcommvac#card **4.** *After the Shots: What to do if your child has discomfort* (Immunize.org): www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4015.pdf

Provided by GSK.

Adapted from https://www.immunize.org/wp-content/uploads/catg.d/p4272a.pdf on 03/03/2026. We thank Immunize.org.

Trademarks are property of their respective owners.

©2026 GSK or licensor.

NPUS-GVULBND260017 August 2026

Produced in USA.