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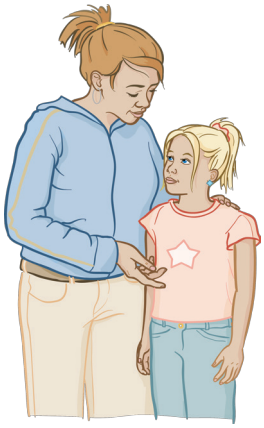
# Reduce the Pain of Vaccination in Kids and Teens

## A Guide for Parents

### Why is vaccination pain a concern?

- Vaccinations are a routine part of a child's medical care. They offer protection from serious diseases.
- Most vaccines are given with a needle. This can be painful and frightening for children.
- Some parents and children delay or stop vaccinations because of pain and fear. This can leave children without protection from serious diseases.

### Plan ahead to reduce pain



- Read this guide to learn about **3 ways you can reduce pain during vaccinations.** These methods are proven to be safe and effective for kids and teens. You can **combine the different methods for better results**.
- Plan what you will do for your child's next vaccination. Carry this card with you and pack any supplies you will need ahead of time. Tell your child's health care provider so they can help you.
- With children 4 years or older, talk ahead of time about:
  1) What will happen: "You will get a medicine to keep you healthy. The medicine is called a vaccine and it goes in your arm with a needle."
  2) How it will feel: "There may be a pinch or some pushing for a few seconds."
  3) What you will do to manage discomfort: "Some kids are bothered by it and others think it is ok. We are going to do some things to make it bother you less." (Then discuss what you will do).
  4) What your child will do: "You can help by choosing a toy to bring."
- After your child's vaccination, judge how much pain your child had. You can observe your child's: body movements (calm or thrashing?), face (normal or locked in a grimace?), and sounds (silent or high-pitched cry?) Children 4 years and older can report their own pain: no pain, a little bit, medium, or a lot.
- Use what your child tells you and what you see to plan what you will do to reduce your child's vaccination pain the next time.
- To see a video, visit Immunize Canada at http://immunize.ca/en/parents/pain.aspx.

### 1. What you can give

**TOPICAL ANAESTHETICS**

- In Canada, you can buy topical anaesthetics (numbing creams and numbing patches) to reduce the pain from needles without a prescription. Available products include: EMLA™ (lidocaine-prilocaine), Ametop™ (tetracaine), and Maxilene™ (lidocaine).
- They dull pain where the needle enters your child's skin. They are safe for children of all ages, even babies.
- You have to wait for topical anaesthetics to take effect. Apply them at home or at the vaccination clinic before the needle. Leave them on the skin undisturbed for the recommended waiting time: 60 minutes for EMLA™; 45 minutes for Ametop™; and 30 minutes for Maxilene™.
- Topical anaesthetics are usually applied to the upper arm. Confirm the location with your child's health care provider. If your child is getting more than one needle, apply to both arms.
- If using the patch, just peel off the backing and stick the patch on the skin. If using the cream or gel, squeeze out 1 g (about the size of a 5-cent coin) on the skin and cover it with the dressing provided or with plastic wrap.
- Remove the medicine after the waiting time. Your child's skin may appear whiter or redder than normal. This is ok and will go away.
- Allergic skin reactions are rare. If there is a rash, talk to your child's health care provider about it. It could be an allergic skin reaction.

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## 2. What you can do

### UPRIGHT POSITIONING

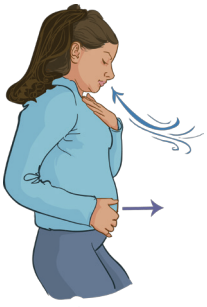
- Have your child sit upright **before, during, and after** the needle. Your child may be held on your lap. This helps your child to feel secure and to stay still.
- Make sure to undress your child to free the arm(s) where the needle will be given.
- *Don't hold children too tightly - if you do, this can increase your child's distress.*

### RUB THE SKIN

- Rub or stroke your child's arm right **before, during and after** the needle. Use a pattern that is comfortable for your child. This takes your child's attention away from pain.
  *Don't rub directly on the injection site – this can increase pain.*

## 3. How you can act

### YOUR STATE OF MIND



- Stay with your child, be calm and use your normal speaking voice **before, during, and after** the needle.
- Acknowledge your child's pain but don't use words that focus your child's attention on the needle and the pain such as:
  1) High anxiety words: Hurt; Pain; Shot
  2) Reassuring words: It'll be over soon; You'll be ok
  3) Apologizing words: I'm sorry you have to go through this; I know it hurts
  4) Criticizing: Don't be a baby; Big girls/boys don't cry
- If you are nervous, you can take a few slow, deep breaths to calm yourself **before, during and after** the needle. Breathe so your belly expands, not your chest.
- Direct your child to take slow deep breaths **before, during and after** the needle. Using bubbles or a pinwheel or pretending to blow out candles can help children to breathe deeply.
- *Keep items that will make children anxious out of sight, like needles.*

### DISTRACT YOUR CHILD

- Taking your child's focus away from the needle can reduce your child's pain.
- Distract with singing, talking, counting, jokes, books, bubbles, pinwheels, toys, or electronic devices like smartphones and computers **before, during, and after** the needle.
- For best results, choose a distraction that involves multiple senses (sight, touch, and hearing) and have your child actively participate. The more involved your child is in the distraction, the better it will work.
- Keep your child's attention on the distraction. Be prepared to change what you are doing to keep your child distracted.
- *There are a few children that cope better if they watch the needle, so if your child says they want to watch, that's ok too.*

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Adapted from CMAJ December 14, 2010 182:E843-E855 by permission of the publisher.
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