

How can I help my child with their Flu Shot?

Flu season is upon us, which prompts the need for flu vaccines. Despite knowing the significant benefits of the flu vaccine, the thought of a shot often triggers fear for both kids and their parents. As you are scheduling your child's visit for a flu vaccine, consider the following strategies for both preparing for the visit and managing pain during the visit.

Strategies for Parents:

1. Act as a "coach." Parents and caregivers can use their attention strategically so that all attention is focused on your child using their own coping strategies (see below for coping strategies).
2. Avoid apologizing to your child. Apologizing maintains that ongoing fear that you have placed them in a HORRIBLE position of receiving a vaccine.
3. Avoid providing reassurance by replacing statements such as, "Don't worry" or "It won't hurt" with "It might pinch for a second, but you have strategies to use." Evidence shows that stating "Don't Worry" or "It won't hurt" is ineffective and promotes distrust. Be honest with your child that it may pinch for a second, but you will coach them through all of the strategies that you practiced before the procedure.
4. Be honest with your children about the vaccine, and walk them through the procedures ahead of time. Role play prior to the procedure can be helpful so they know what to expect. Remember to let them know that they may feel a pinch for just a second, but they have strategies they can use to help minimize the pain.
5. Set children up for success by talking about vaccines in a "matter of fact" manner. Vaccines are something that we all receive to stay healthy.

Strategies for Kids:

1. Use distraction. Distraction is a simple evidence-based technique that parents and kids can utilize to help reduce pain-related distress at the time of the injection. Bring a favorite book to the appointment, listen to a favorite song, or talk about preferred topics during the injection. For young children, blowing bubbles or pinwheels during the procedure can allow the child to take deep breaths while they are also distracted.
2. Use regulated breathing. Kids can take a deep breath in while counting to 4 and then breathe out while counting to 4.
3. An ice pack can be used to numb the area where the vaccine will be administered. These can be purchased and brought into the clinic if you feel this strategy will be helpful for your child.
4. Have your child sit upright on the table if fainting is not a concern. It is recommended that parents hold young children.