

Making it better: Helpful tips for managing vaccinations

We know no one really likes having injections. Having a few worries about needles is a really normal reaction - sometimes this is because of previous experiences, sometimes it is not something that you can put your finger on - it just makes you feel nervous. Here are some helpful tips for approaching vaccinations; the following can be used to support children's common vaccines as well as for adults getting flu or COVID-19 vaccinations this year.

- **What's the worry?** Figure out what is really making you worry - is it the needle itself? is it understanding the procedure? Anticipating the side effects? We often think things will be worse than they are...Once you can get clear about which part bothers you - you can work out how to make it easier. If you are uncertain what is going to happen during your procedure please ask - it helps to feel prepared.
- **A coping strategy** can create some certainty and predictability – this will provide a sense of control and help to make this a more positive experience. Think about how you want to approach your vaccinations, what strategies you will use to make the experience easier and what others can do to help.
- **Simple steps:** If you know that waiting for your vaccination makes you anxious try to ask for an early morning appointment so you are not anticipating it all day. Ensure you have a top on that makes it easy to access your upper arm – faffing around with clothing at the last minute can increase stress in the moment.
- **Taking a support person** can lower your stress levels. In general we advocate for children to approach health care experiences with a trusted adult – someone to give a cuddle, rub their arm, hold their hand....often some contact and support is helpful for our rangitahi and adults too. If you are nervous or worried think about having someone there with you.
- **LOOK / DON'T LOOK....** some people like to look at what is happening - it helps them to know exactly what is happening and when; others really don't want to see anything and would prefer not to look. Ask your child or check in with your self - what would make you more comfortable? Do you want to look? or focus on something else? This can be part of your coping strategy.
- **Alternative focus...or distraction?** It is often helpful if you are worried, or you do not want to look, to plan for something else to focus on. For children this can be as easy as playing i-spy, popping bubbles, singing a song together or focusing on a video. For rangitahi or grown-ups often a game on mobile phone or ipad, a great conversation, good joke or focused breathing can be helpful. Taking your mind off what is happening can make things much easier.
- **Just breathe.....**did you know that taking several deep breaths actually helps break down the stress chemicals in your body? There are so many apps and short videos now that focus on deep breathing...find one that you like and give it a go. Practice makes perfect so do some slow deep breaths before you go in...when you are worried it is harder to focus and keep on task... you can use your hands as a little guide.

A simple breathing exercise: Spread out one hand – use the pointer finger of your other hand to trace around your fingers as you control your breathing. Trace up your thumb...breathe in, down the other side....breathe out, trace up your pointer finger...breathe in, down the other side....breathe out, trace up your middle finger....breathe in, keep it nice and slow...breathe out....keep going until you reach the far side of your pinky finger. This is a simple activity you can use while getting your vaccinations, or to calm yourself whenever you are feeling nervous... Once you have reached the end think about how you are feeling...you can easily go back to the beginning and start again.

Deep breathing using your hand.



Image from [Public Health Wales](https://www.health.gov.au)

What to expect: Our COVID-19 vaccinations are quite quick – there is a short questionnaire, the vaccinator will check which arm you would prefer to use, a quick wipe to clean the skin, and then the small needle is used – usually the actual needle is in the skin only for 3-4 seconds...most people say that it was not painful compared to other experiences. Getting vaccinated protects you, your whānau and your community.

For up to date information on COVID-19 please visit [Unite against COVID-19](https://www.uniteagainstcovid19.org.nz) or



It is important to let your health provider know if you have concerns - they can help reassure you, answer any questions or support you with your coping strategy to make your vaccination as easy as possible.