

Preparing for a COVID-19 vaccine

Q: How can caregivers prepare their loved ones with autism for a COVID-19 vaccine?

A: Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have already faced isolation, changes to their routines, and disruptions to their therapeutic care and education. The process of getting vaccinated poses an added challenge, especially since many times the shots aren't being given in a typical doctor's office setting.

Depending on the person with ASD's ability to understand and express language, caregivers should try to explain the reason for the shot, what to expect at each step, and perhaps even do a practice run.

The Autism Society of America has published social stories on its website that may be helpful to someone with autism. You can download them at www.covid19autism-society.org to help prepare your loved one for the COVID-19 vaccines, testing, and more.

Calming techniques to try

BREATHE 4-4-4	DISTRACT yourself	ASK questions
Breathe slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth. Count to four for each in-breath and each out-breath.	Talk to someone about something you're really interested in.	Take the time you need when communicating a question, concern, or thought.
Breathe and hold for one...two...three...four.	Describe the small details you see around you.	If you are feeling frustrated or worried, take some breaths and speak slowly.
Breathe out through your mouth for one...two...three...four.	Think about something you're looking forward to.	Remember that your doctor wants to help and answer your questions.
Repeat.	Play with a sensory item. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • squeeze ball • pop-it toy 	



For more information: CovidVaccineWA.org

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CARD system

This system can be customized to each child, starting with identifying the exact source of anxiety when it comes to getting a shot. Use some or all the steps below, but also take the time to explain to your child how important their action is to keeping themselves and others safe. The right frame of mind can go a long way to alleviating fears.

<p>COMFORT</p>	<p><i>What makes your child feel most comfortable?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding someone's hand? • Wearing comfy clothes? • Sitting a certain way? • Numbing cream? • Soothing arm rub? 		
<p>ASK</p>	<p><i>Worry can make fear worse. When we don't feel like we know what's going on, we get scared.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your child ask questions. • Answer them as honestly as possible. • Ask the health care professional to talk through the process. <p><i>The more they know about what to expect, the better.</i></p>		
<p>RELAX</p>	<p><i>Positive self-talk:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can do this! • I am brave! 	<p><i>Positive talk from a parent or caregiver:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will be over soon. • What you're doing is keeping you and other people safe. • You're doing great! 	<p><i>Additional techniques:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belly breaths. • Focus on lowering your heart rate.
<p>DISTRACT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play a game on a cell phone. • Play with a fidget toy. • Listen to music. • Look at a book. • Do some drawing. • Focus on details around the room. 		

Other resources and techniques

- Use a social story in advance of the vaccine appointment to walk your child through the steps (see examples from University of Cincinnati at www.ucucedd.org or UC Davis at health.ucdavis.edu).
- Buy unique bandages in fun shapes for your child to choose from after the shot.
- Request a private space for your child to receive the vaccine.
- Request a quiet place to spend 15 minutes after the vaccine.
- Bring a snack for afterward.
- If your child has a service animal, allow them to accompany your child to the appointment.



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