



IMPROVING THE VACCINATION EXPERIENCE:

A guide for school staff

Vaccines are medicines that teach the body to recognize germs that cause diseases. If the body comes in contact with the germs in the future, it will be able to stop them. Most vaccines are given with a needle. This can be painful or scary for some children and contribute to high levels of anxiety and fear. Use this factsheet to help prepare students for a positive vaccination experience at school.

The **CARD system (Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract)** teaches students how to cope with vaccinations. CARD is proven to reduce stress-related responses, including pain, fear, dizziness and fainting. Learn how you and your students can **play your cards** to reduce the pain, stress and worries associated with vaccinations.

You can also review [Improving the vaccination experience: Checklist for school staff](#) to see what you can do preparing for and on vaccination day to improve the vaccination experience for students. To learn more about CARD, go to AboutKidsHealth.ca/CARD.

COMFORT

How you can play your Comfort CARD

Review information factsheets such as this one and attend education sessions to know what to expect and to learn about ways you can make yourself more comfortable. After you prepare yourself, prepare your students.

- Give your students information about the procedure. Tell them what will happen and how it will feel. Practice the CARD system with students to help them cope during vaccination.
- Involve and listen to your students. They often have helpful suggestions for how to manage their pain and fear (e.g., they can choose an item to bring).
- Allow time for your students to have a snack before and after vaccination.
- Find out what coping strategies your students want to use and plan for them ahead of time. There are many evidence-based coping strategies they can choose from. The most popular choices are distraction items (e.g., toy or electronic device); vaccination in a private space out of view of peers; and presence of a peer support person. Provide distraction items or allow students to bring distraction items such as personal devices or squishy toys.
- Identify for the nurse any students that have special requests (such as privacy or the company of a support person during vaccination) to ensure the requests are accommodated on vaccination day.
- Topical anesthetics are medicines that temporarily numb the skin and reduce the pain from the needle poke. They are sometimes called ‘numbing creams.’ Some children may request to use them for vaccinations. Planning is required as they take time to work (30-60 minutes).

COMFORT

Find ways to be comfortable.



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- Provide balanced information. Do not say that vaccination will hurt. Instead, describe sensations (e.g., Some people say they feel “pressure” or a “pinch” or “nothing at all”) and duration (e.g., it lasts “about a second”) and invite your students to tell you how it felt (e.g., “I don’t know how it will feel for you. Let me know how it felt when you are done.”)
- Communicate using neutral language (e.g., “What do you want to be doing when you get the vaccine?”). Do not use words that elicit fear (e.g., the needle “stings”) and do not use repetitive reassurance (e.g., “You’ll be fine”) or dismiss concerns (e.g., “Don’t worry”).
- Monitor students when they return to class and send any students who are feeling unwell back to the nurse with a buddy.

How your students can play their Comfort CARD

Encourage your students to prepare for vaccination day by teaching them about the CARD system. Some things they can do to feel comfortable are:

- Select comfort items to bring such as a squishy toy.
- Select a short-sleeved shirt or loose-fitting shirt they can wear that lets their upper arm be reached easily.
- Practice relaxing their arm and making it loose or jiggly.
- Practice [squeezing their knees together](#) just in case they feel faint or dizzy.

ASK

How you can play your Ask CARD

Make sure your questions are answered so you feel comfortable and prepared. Some questions you can ask include:

- When are vaccinations being scheduled for my students?
- What activities can I plan to make the day less stressful for my students?
- What will happen on vaccination day?
- How will my students’ preferences be accommodated?
- How can I help my students prepare for vaccination?



How your students can play their Ask CARD

Invite your students to ask questions to help them be more prepared for their vaccination. If you can, answer your student’s questions. Ask your public health nurse for help. If your students do not seem interested or are not ready to talk, that is OK. Tell them they can always come to you if they have questions. To help your students be more prepared for their vaccination they can ask questions such as:

- What will happen and what will it feel like?
- Can I bring a friend or family member to support me?
- Can I have the vaccine in a private space out of view of peers?
- Can I bring my cell phone and play a game to distract me during vaccination?
- Can I use a numbing cream to dull the pain?
- Can I lie down?
 - [What can I do if I feel faint or dizzy?](#)

RELAX

How you can play your Relax CARD

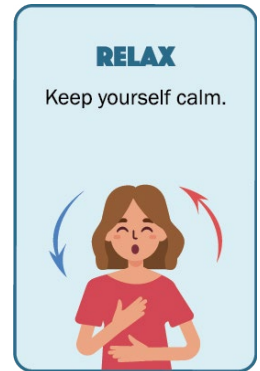
Your actions and words can influence your student's reaction. Foster a calm environment and be positive. If you are calm and use your normal voice, your students will feel that everything is OK.

- Use neutral and calming language to minimize fear.
- Work with the nurse to help plan activities to keep your students calm on vaccination day.
- Plan a fun activity for your students on vaccination day to keep them calm.
- If you are nervous, think of things that normally keep you relaxed. For example, you can take deep belly breaths. Do this by taking slow deep breaths into your belly, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.

How your students can play their Relax CARD

Encourage your students to stay calm and relaxed. To help prepare your students for their vaccination they can:

- Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing.
- Practice positive self-talk (tell yourself you can handle this).



DISTRACT

How you can play your Distract CARD

Try to limit the amount of time you are focusing on the procedure if it is making you nervous or worried.

How your students can play their Distract CARD

Encourage your students to limit the amount of time they are focusing on the procedure if it is making them nervous or worried.

- If your students are interested in being distracted, they can select some distraction items to use to take their minds off the procedure.

