

COVID-19 Vaccine: 5-11 year olds Factsheet

How to speak to children about getting the vaccine

It's natural for your child to be curious and to have lots of questions about COVID-19 vaccinations. Here are some tips for speaking to children before and after they receive a vaccine.

Start a conversation and listen to your child's response

Start a conversation with your child and invite them to share what they have heard about COVID-19 vaccines. It's important to listen to their responses and acknowledge any fears they have about being vaccinated.

For example:

- Tell me what you know so far about the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Do you remember the last time you had a vaccine?
- What did that feel like?

The chances are your child has had a vaccine before and it may not have been so bad.

Be open about the vaccine and the vaccination process

Explain honestly and in an age-appropriate way what you know about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Oversharing fears may not be constructive and may make your child feel uncomfortable.

It may help to explain to your child what they can expect on the day of the appointment.

Explain that the doctor or medical professional will ask your child some questions, that your child will receive a needle in their arm, that they'll feel a small prick and their arm might be a little bit sore afterwards. Reassure your child by telling them it's normal for their arm to be a little bit sore, and it means the medicine is working.

If your child seems anxious about getting vaccinated, try finding out more about their feelings or seek further advice from your doctor if necessary.

Answer your child's questions

Have some child-friendly responses ready for any questions your child might have. Here are some of the key questions and answers that might help in this conversation:

What is a vaccine?

A vaccine is a medicine that helps people fight a virus if they come in contact with it.

It can stop people from getting very sick.

Why do I need to be vaccinated?

The COVID-19 vaccine is a safe way to protect you, your family, and your friends from getting sick.

Use real examples, such as protecting the child's grandparents, and being able to get back to school and back to team sports if you think this will help.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines work by teaching your body how to fight illness.

Is the vaccine safe?

Vaccines are very safe. In Australia, they have been tested thoroughly by an agency that makes sure all medicines are safe. They would not be given to people if they were not safe.

Fear of needles

If your child is afraid of needles, be prepared with some distractions. Bring along your child's favourite toys or books to create a positive experience and distraction.

It may help your child to attend a smaller, more familiar location, such as their GP clinic. Large vaccination sites may be loud and busy and increase distress.

Let your provider know in advance if your child is afraid of needles so they can set aside enough time and make sure the process is not rushed or forced.

Side effects to the vaccine

Your child may experience some side effects after vaccination. Side effects are normal and a good sign that the vaccine is working. Common reactions to vaccination include:

- pain or swelling at the injection site
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle pain
- joint pain

- redness or itching at the injection site
- nausea
- fever and chills
- insomnia
- feeling unwell

These side effects are usually mild and go away within one or two days. If they experience pain at the injection site or fever, headaches or body aches after vaccination, you can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen. If there is swelling at the injection site, you can use a cold compress.

You should seek medical attention after vaccination if:

- You think they are having an allergic reaction. Call 000 if they experience severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, wheezing, a fast heartbeat or collapsing.
- You are worried about a potential side effect or they have new or unexpected symptoms.
- They are experiencing severe and on-going headaches.
- They have an expected side effect of the vaccine which has not gone away after a few days.

For symptoms which are not urgent, you can see your regular healthcare provider.