



# IMPROVING THE VACCINATION EXPERIENCE:

A guide for health-care providers

In Canada, about 1 in 4 adults report they are afraid of needles and about 1 in 10 report that concerns about needle pain influence their decision to get vaccinated.

The **CARD system (Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract)** was developed to reduce stress during vaccination. It provides four categories of evidence-based activities that health-care providers and patients can **play to have a better vaccination experience**.

You can also review the [Improving the vaccination experience: Planning checklist for health-care providers](#) to see what you can do when setting up a vaccination site to improve the vaccination experience for patients. To learn more about CARD go to [AboutKidsHealth.ca/CARD](http://AboutKidsHealth.ca/CARD).

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PEOPLE PLAY THEIR CARDS?

**COMFORT**  
Find ways to be comfortable.

### COMFORT

Provide information about CARD to patients ahead of time so they know what to expect and how to cope. During vaccination, encourage patients to sit upright and to relax their arm. If they are prone to getting dizzy or fainting, suggest they squeeze their knees together or lie down during the vaccination. Have seating available to accommodate a support person.

**ASK**  
Ask questions to be prepared.

### ASK

You can review immunization policies related to reducing stress and pain, and promoting client-centred care. If you are more confident, others will pick up on that. Encourage patients to ask questions so they are prepared. People are anxious when they do not have enough information. Invite patients to play their CARDS during vaccination.

**RELAX**  
Keep yourself calm.

### RELAX

You can reduce fear cues. These are words or objects that are fear-inducing, such as needles. You can try to minimize excessive noise and activity. And make sure you stay calm and positive.

**DISTRACT**  
Shift your attention to something else.

### DISTRACT

For patients that want to be distracted during vaccination, offer to engage in a conversation. Some people do not want to be distracted. That's OK too.

Financial contribution from



Public Health Agency of Canada  
Agence de la santé publique du Canada



Partner Organizations





# VACCINATION DAY CHECKLIST

## EDUCATION OF PATIENTS AND CAREGIVERS

- Hand out CARD pamphlets while patients are waiting.
- Hand out vaccine information.
- Post signage that tells people what will happen.

## ASSESSMENT OF PATIENTS

- Screen patients for level of fear of needles and past history of fainting.
- Triage patients by level of fear and provide topical anesthetics for those who want it.
- Review CARD and answer any questions that patients have.

## DURING VACCINATION

- Foster a calm environment and be positive.
- Review patients' medical history, including fainting and level of fear about vaccination.
- Answer patients' questions.
- Communicate using neutral language (e.g., How do you want me to let you know when I am ready to give you 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).
- Provide balanced information. Do not say that vaccination will not 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 patients 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 we are done.)
- Ask patients what CARDS they are playing (i.e., What coping strategies they want to use) and accommodate requests (e.g., distraction, support person, topical anesthetic). Do not impose coping strategies such as looking away during the injection, taking a deep breath before the injection or verbally distracting the patient. These interventions are counter to the preferred coping strategies for many patients and lead to increased levels of fear or distress.
- Provide distraction items for patients that do not have their own but would like to be distracted (in keeping with infection control and prevention guidelines).

- Ask patients which arm they want vaccinated. If there is no preference, inject the non-dominant arm.
- Encourage patients to relax their arm and keep it still during the injection (e.g., I have a couple of jobs for you to do to help me – first, relax your arm so it is loose or jiggle; second, keep your arm still).
- Consider not using alcohol to cleanse the skin as this step is unnecessary (World Health Organization; 2010), adds time and can increase stress.
- Inject patients sitting upright (for children they may sit on a parent's/guardian's lap).
- Inject the vaccine quickly, without prior aspiration. Do not press on or rub the injection site as this increases pain.
- Monitor patients after vaccination. Suggest they squeeze their knees together if they are dizzy or prone to fainting. You may also offer for them to lie down in a reclining chair or on a gym mat.
- Counsel patients regarding post-injection reactions and the use of acetaminophen and ibuprofen.

## AFTER VACCINATION

- Screen for adverse reactions. Suggest patients squeeze their knees together if they feel dizzy.
- Provide and/or allow the use of distraction items.
- Obtain feedback about the experience to inform future practice.
- End visit on a positive note (e.g., Thanks for getting vaccinated. You did a great job relaxing!) and provide a reward (e.g., sticker, photo, treat).

