



Supporting Adults to Manage Their “Needle Fear:” COVID-19 Vaccination

Public health nurses have the opportunity to discuss with families their decisions and plans for receiving the COVID-19 vaccination. Concerns about discomfort or a “needle fear” might be one barrier to agreeing to get the vaccine. This resource provides guidance on how to support adults in developing a strategy to increase comfort before and during their vaccination.

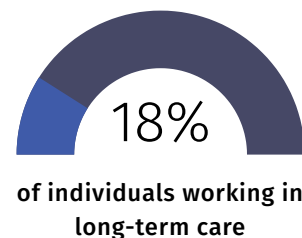
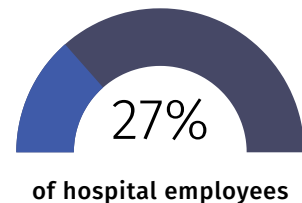
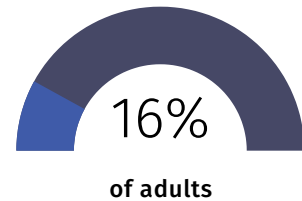
In conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine, when an individual expresses hesitancy:

- Listen
- Identify the specific concern(s)
- Validate and acknowledge that [some individuals do not feel safe](#) when they are seeking care or receiving a vaccine.

When a concern is related to the discomfort in receiving the vaccination, or “needle fear,” support the individual to develop a strategy to increase their comfort level before and during the injection.



Needle fear may lead to vaccination avoidance and is estimated to occur¹ in:



Guidance for public health nurses providing anticipatory guidance to individuals or families before the vaccination:²

<p>1</p> <p>Provide information about what will happen at the vaccination appointment.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Explain what they can expect to feel physically during the vaccination.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Explore strategies that may increase comfort and safety:</p>
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What are things that you normally do to feel calm or relaxed?

Do you prefer to be distracted or look while the procedure is occurring?

Is application of a topical anesthetic an option you would like to explore?

Is there someone who can support you during your vaccination?



Words Matter!

Use strengths-based, positive language.

- ✓ *"I can see that keeping yourself and your family healthy is very important to you, your decision to be vaccinated will help to protect you and your family."*
- ✓ Use words like poke, pressure, or squeeze.
- ✓ Acknowledge strengths. *"I really noticed how well you relaxed your arm."*
- ✓ Answer questions about discomfort honestly. *"Yes, this will feel uncomfortable for a very brief period of time, but it will go away."*

- ✗ Don't use words like hurt, pain, sting, or shot.
- ✗ Don't offer false assurances.
- ✗ Don't use language that amplifies fear or pain.

Guidance for public health nurses administering the vaccine:²

- Communication is essential. Encourage vaccinators to ask individuals to share past experiences that were difficult or painful, and then explore what strategies are needed now to increase safety.
- Have the individual sit up in a comfortable position. This provides them with a greater sense of control. For some individuals being in a supine position while being vaccinated may increase their sense of vulnerability.
- Ask permission to touch the individual's arm. Encourage them to relax their arm.
- Provide clear information about “**what happens next**” with each step of the procedure. This includes signaling to the individual that they are about to get the injection.
- If it's helpful, the individual might choose to look away, take deep breaths, or “pretend to blow some bubbles.”

If required, present option to lie down as a choice; this position may make some people feel less safe and more vulnerable.

Is there anything you'd like to share with me about your past experience(s) with vaccines or needles?

What can I do to help make this a more positive experience?



Recommend **muscle tension** for an individual with a history of dizziness or fainting. Fainting is caused by a sudden drop in blood pressure. Creating muscle tension increases one's blood pressure prior to and during the injection, thus preventing the person from fainting.

While they are sitting in the chair, have the individual:

- Squeeze the muscles in their stomach or legs for 10-15 seconds;
- Release the tension for 20-30 seconds; and
- Repeat squeezing and release until the vaccination is finished or the feeling of dizziness passes.

Communication Teams!³

When developing communication/educational resources about vaccinations, avoid messages, language and images that may result in negative emotions like fear or shame. Photos or graphics of someone being vaccinated should convey hope, happiness or the promotion of one's well-being (or that of their family members)!

¹McLenon, J., & Rogers, M.A.M. (2019). The fear of needles: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 75(1), 30-42.

²Taddio, A., et al. (2015). Reducing pain during vaccine injections: Clinical practice guideline. *CMAJ*, 187(13), 975-982.

³Chou, W., Burgdorf, C.E., Gaysynsky, A., & Hunter, C.M. (2020). COVID-19 vaccination communication: Applying behavioral and social science to address vaccine hesitancy and foster vaccine confidence. National Institutes of Health. https://obssr.od.nih.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/COVIDReport_Final.pdf

Citation: Jack, S.M & Orr, E. on behalf of the PHN-PREP Project Team (2021). Supporting adults to manage their “needle fear”: COVID-19 vaccination. [Professional Resource]. School of Nursing, McMaster University.

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