



# How to speak to kids about COVID-19 vaccines

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The safety of the Australian population has always been the Australian Government's highest priority. For this reason, decisions regarding COVID-19 vaccines have been, and continue to be, based on the expert medical advice of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

ATAGI recommends COVID-19 vaccination in everyone from 5 years of age.

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.

## Stay up to date with the latest information and advice

It's important to stay up to date with the latest medical advice available on [Health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au).

You can also discuss any concerns or questions you have about COVID-19 vaccination with your immunisation provider and/or your GP before your child receives the 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.
- Have you ever had a vaccine before?
- 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.

Remember children take emotional cues from adults, so 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 exploring their feelings further or seek further advice from your GP if necessary.

## **Answer your child's questions**

Have some kid-friendly responses ready to go 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, effective preparation and distraction techniques are important.

It may help your child to attend a smaller, more familiar location, such as a local pharmacy or general practice. Large scale vaccination sites may be loud and busy and increase distress.

Bring along your child's favourite toys or books to create a positive experience and distraction.

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.

## **More information**

You can visit the Department of Health website at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) for more information about the vaccine.

You can call the National Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccine Helpline on **1800 020 080**.

If you need information in a language other than English, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**.

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can call the National Relay Service on **133 677**.