

OFFICIAL



# COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

Guidance for Clinical Leads on adapting the vaccination environment for children

December 2021

# Why is it important?



New environments and experiences can be overwhelming for children.

**Anxiety and fear** can be triggered by:

1. Unfamiliar surroundings and people
2. Unknown clinical procedures
3. The potential for pain



A child's anxiety and fear can have an **impact on the way they behave**.

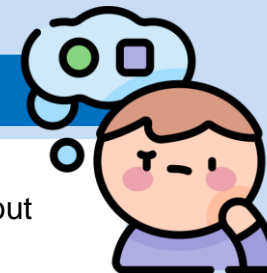
A child-friendly environment is important for the security and wellbeing of the child.

- Children tend to remember places and sensations more than they remember people. They **react more strongly than adults to their environment**.
- Clinical environments can be bright, loud and scary, which can **amplify any underlying anxiety** the child has about what they are about to experience.
- If they are experiencing something new, they may use clues from their environment to **understand and make sense** of what is happening.



Negative experiences can have lasting impacts.

A negative experience can not only cause the child stress at the time, but is also likely to negatively **influence how they perceive other procedures**. Their experience of receiving their COVID-19 vaccination could impact on how they feel about receiving other vaccinations.



# Key principles



- ✓ Entrances should be **welcoming and inviting** for children.
- ✓ **Providing information** helps the child feel more in control and reduce the sense of unfamiliarity.
- ✓ Children benefit from **sensory stimulation** (e.g. interesting sights and sounds). However they can be sensitive to loud noises and smells associated with clinical environments, so sites should try to address these where possible.
- ✓ Waiting areas should be **relaxing and provide stimulation** to prevent the child from getting bored or frustrated.
- ✓ **Distraction and diversion techniques** before, during and after the procedure can be used to reduce anxiety.
- ✓ Whilst displaying posters can provide stimulation, too many posters with lots of information can be overwhelming. **Interesting or interactive artwork** can also offer opportunities for engagement.
- ✓ Site changes made must consider and adhere to guidelines/policies around **infection prevention and control** (please consult your local IPC team to ensure any environmental changes or activities adhere to local IPC protocols).
- ✓ If adults and children are all being vaccinated in a single space, then sites must be appropriately set up for **all age groups**. Posters which children may find scary (e.g. stop smoking posters with scary images) should be removed.
- ✓ There should be **appropriate procedures and security support in place for responding to any challenging behaviours** exhibited by parents or children who may be anxious or stressed.

**THINK: Care, Protect & Respect**

**Care** - for the child throughout their vaccination j

**Protect** – the child’s sense of safety, security an

**Respect** – the child’s emotions, behaviours and



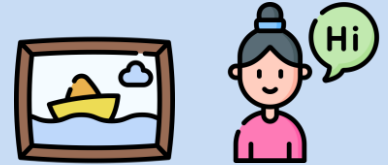
# How?



## Entrances:

Entrances should be welcoming and inviting for children.

- **Friendly staff & volunteers:** To meet & greet children in an engaging way & provide reassurance
- **Artwork & posters:** To make it feel less clinical, to engage them & to show that other children have attended before them



## Familiarisation with environment and staff:

Children want to know where they are, who they're going to meet and what's going to happen.

- **Where:** Maps & directions (e.g. signposting, floor markers, artwork & objects as 'landmarks')
- **Who:** 'Meet the team' photos & staff introductions
- **What:** Use of images/icons on doors & staff handovers



## Queueing and waiting areas:

Queueing and waiting areas need to be calming in order to reduce anxiety and create a sense of safety. They should also provide children with opportunities to 'engage' with the environment.

- **Calming:** Ambient background music, away from loud noise (e.g. traffic), windows with outside views or 'virtual windows'
- **Engaging:** TV screens playing age-appropriate programmes, artwork, activity sheets, engaging staff & volunteers, bring a toy from home



## Distraction and diversion:

Distraction and diversion is a way of helping children cope with scary situations or painful procedures. Distraction and diversion can be used along the entire vaccination journey.

- **Pre-vaccination:** Distract from the upcoming procedure (e.g. selfie walls, activity sheets, artwork, engaging staff & volunteers)
- **During vaccination:** Divert attention away from the needle (e.g. artwork, controlled breathing, guided imagery, engaging staff & volunteers)
- **Post-vaccination:** Distract from the potential pain/soreness in their arm and prevent boredom if they need to wait in the observation area (e.g. activity sheets, use of play, bring a toy from home, engaging staff & volunteers, tv screens, social media, whiteboards, feedback wall)



# Play techniques



*“Play has an astounding ability to connect and open up communication with children and young people... We can use play to help them identify and express feelings of anxiety. We can support them to form strategies to help them feel safer, calmer and empowered to make decisions about how to cope.”*

**Sian Spencer-Little, Deputy Head of Play, Great Ormond Street Hospital**

The role of play and recreation is significant for all children, who want playful activities and facilities reflected throughout the whole environment.

Many Trusts have teams of dedicated **Play Specialists** who are skilled in reassuring children during procedures and helping them deal with any fears and anxieties. They can provide further advice on creating an environment where stress and worry are reduced, help with distracting children before and during the vaccination procedure, and organise activities to help children to express their feelings.

## Play can be used to:

- **Prepare** – using pictures, dolls or role-play to help the child understand the vaccination procedure and its importance.
- **Distract** – taking the child’s attention away from what is happening to help them remain calm during and after the vaccination.
- **Reflect** – helping the child to make sense of what has happened and express their feelings in a safe and secure environment.

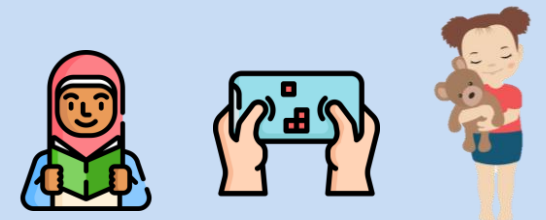


Using playful engagement and exploration we can support children to settle in and to make sense of the vaccination process, ensuring the experience is a positive one.

## Things that can help:

**Familiar toys and objects to help the child to feel calmer** – encourage them to bring in a favourite toy or an object that they associate with home (e.g. a comfort blanket). This will give them an element of control in an unfamiliar situation.

**Distraction techniques** – taking their attention away from procedures while they are happening and distracting them from any soreness or pain to speed up their recovery after their vaccination.



# Practical tips



We understand that vaccination sites will be limited in the amount of changes that can be made due to time, cost and their potentially temporary nature. Sites also still need to be appropriate for adults who are receiving their vaccinations. Below are some practical tips for adapting sites to ensure children have as positive a vaccination experience as possible.



**Provide clear directions** e.g. arrows on the floor, signposts, object/artwork 'landmarks'



**Ensure familiarisation with staff/environment** e.g. provide a map & introduce the people they will be seeing

**Engage the senses** e.g. artwork, colours & music in waiting areas

**Incorporate play** e.g. printed puzzles, colouring pages, activity sheets, bring a toy from home



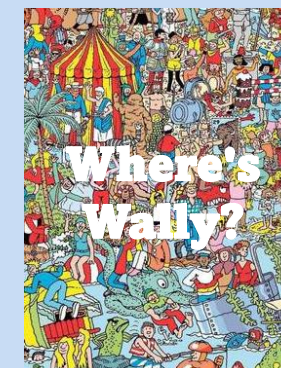
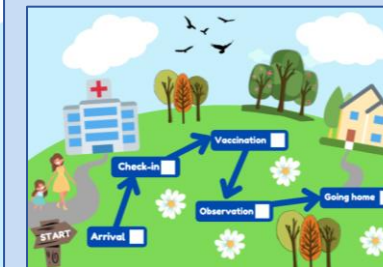
**Draw on skills/experience of staff & volunteers** e.g. for welcoming, distracting & engaging with children along the pathway

**Consider placement of waiting areas & seating** e.g. near windows/natural light & away from loud noise



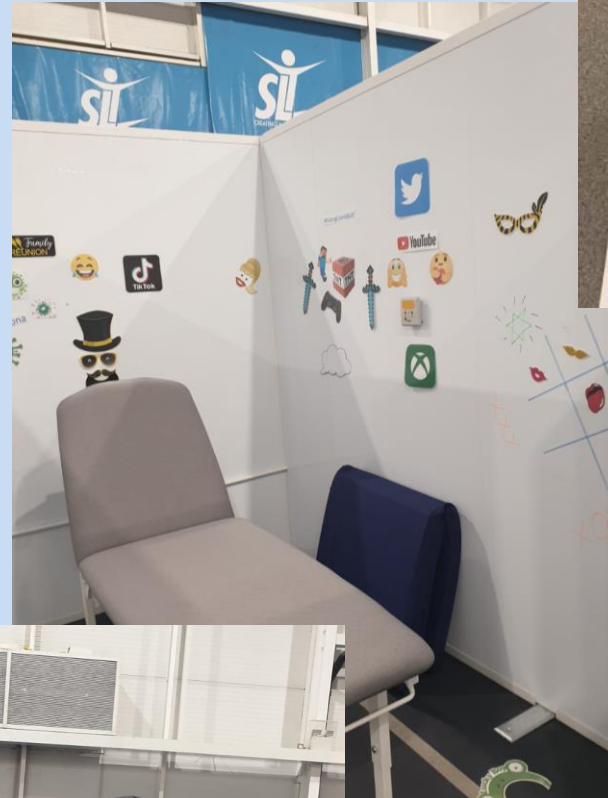
**Distract their attention away from the needle** e.g. artwork, engaging staff & volunteers, distraction techniques

**Use of rewards** e.g. give them a sticker or a certificate as a reward for their bravery





# Example: Tipton Sports Academy Vaccination Centre



<https://future.nhs.uk/CovidVaccinations/view?objectId=120451077>

# Further materials



## Free downloadable and printable activity sheets:

- Learning Resources: Free activity sheets. <https://www.learningresources.co.uk/free-activity-sheets-for-kids>
- Orchard Toys: [https://www.orchardtoys.com/dept/activity-sheets\\_d0129.htm](https://www.orchardtoys.com/dept/activity-sheets_d0129.htm)

## Further guidance on distraction techniques, use of play and managing paediatric anxiety:

- “COVID-19 Distraction techniques for child vaccinations” staff resource: <https://future.nhs.uk/CovidVaccinations/view?objectId=121751237>
- “COVID-19 Top tips for supporting children and young people during vaccination” poster: <https://future.nhs.uk/CovidVaccinations/view?objectId=109913605>
- GOSH: Distraction. <https://www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/procedures-and-treatments/distraction/>
- GOSH: The Power of Play Hub. <https://www.gosh.org/the-power-of-play/>
- Paediatric procedural anxiety module for COVID-19 vaccinations. <https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/Component/Details/730352>

## Research and guidance on healthcare environments for children:

- Healthcare Play Specialist Education Trust: Exploring the impact environments have on children and young people’s experience of healthcare. [https://www.hpset.org.uk/downloads/research\\_development/HPSET\\_CEC%20Report.pdf](https://www.hpset.org.uk/downloads/research_development/HPSET_CEC%20Report.pdf)
- Innovative materials in children’s hospital design conference paper. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264973456\\_INNOVATIVE\\_MATERIALS\\_IN\\_CHILDREN'S\\_HOSPITAL\\_DESIGN](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264973456_INNOVATIVE_MATERIALS_IN_CHILDREN'S_HOSPITAL_DESIGN)
- NHS Estates: Friendly healthcare environments for children and young people. <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/documents/254/friendkids.pdf>

## Guidance for Site Leads on managing challenging behaviours

- [Managing challenging behaviours pack for Site Managers](#)

Thank you!

We would like to say **thank you to Barts Health NHS Trust** who provided valuable input to this guidance.