

Scottish autism

WHERE AUTISTIC PEOPLE
ARE VALUED

Supporting someone with the COVID-19 vaccine

Each person will respond to medical procedures (e.g. blood tests, temperature tests, dental work) differently, and each person will have a different physical and psychological perception of discomfort and what procedures are “invasive”.

However, it is highly likely your child, or the person you support, has received vaccines in the past. You may therefore already know if the person you support, or your child, will find having the vaccines too difficult, or alternatively, if your child, or the person you support, is normally happy to engage.

Due to the likelihood of your child, or the person you support having received vaccines in the past you may be able to reflect on what strategies have worked in the past, and what may be incorporated into supporting them to have the COVID-19 vaccine. Here are some questions to help you reflect on what support they may need:

- Does the person you support require a Social Story before a vaccine or medical procedure?
- Do they like to see photographs of the room, the equipment, or person who will be administering?
- Do they prefer to hold somebody’s hand or hold a comfort item?
- Do they prefer to have procedures completed by somebody who is fun and conversational?
- Do they require a lot of notice and processing time for procedures, or prefer to be told closer to the time?
- Would listening to their favourite song during the procedure help?

Be honest about the vaccines, and answer any questions

Find out as much as you can about the appointment, so you are ready to answer questions and explain this to the person who will receive the vaccines. You may want to take a look at our common [questions and answer resource](#), however they may ask more specific questions such as:

- Will it hurt?
This is a difficult question to answer, and should be answered as accurately and honestly as possible. This will be dependent on that individual’s perception of pain and what they usually report as painful.

You may need to think back to past experiences they have had in order to answer this question for them. For example, you have to consider how they have reported pain and discomfort in the past, and use this to help them accurately judge whether or not this will be a painful experience for them. Here are ways to help communicate this accurately:

It might not feel very nice.

Some people have said that it hurts.

It might hurt.

It is important not to inform the person or young person that it will not be painful/uncomfortable unless you are sure that this will be an accurate illustration of their experience.

- Will it take long?

The vaccine should take no more than a couple of minutes, but it is important to consider the person's perception of time, and if this will be "long" for them. It may be reassuring for them to have a timer, or to have a supporting person count down from a specified number, to inform them of how long the procedure will take, and to help them judge during the procedure.

Communicate a method of withdrawing consent

[Consenting to having](#) the vaccines is important. However, if a person experiences extreme distress or discomfort during their appointment, it is important that they can communicate that they would like the procedure to stop or pause. Some may find verbally withdrawing consent difficult. Some individuals may feel more comfortable approaching their appointment if they know that they have a method of stopping it. You may wish to incorporate a method into a Social Story if you are using one, or provide a written reminder to the individual of how they can withdraw their consent.

Possible methods of withdrawing consent:

- Raising their hand
- Moving their head back
- Providing the individual with a "stop" card.
- If a person may not be able to use the above methods, an accompanying person who knows the individual well can communicate on their behalf if they feel that the appointment is causing distress.