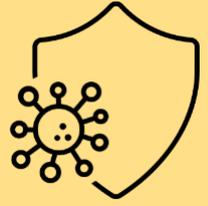




How to explain vaccines to your child: Conversation tips for parents



COVID-19 continues to be an issue affecting our daily lives. In an effort to return to normal life and reduce, if not eradicate restrictions, vaccines have been developed for mass distribution. However, if this is to be effective, a high percentage of the population needs to receive this vaccine. While it may seem like a long time before children will be offered the vaccine, we believe that beginning the conversation of vaccines early can be extremely helpful in preparing your child for receiving it and educating them at the same time.

Getting a vaccination for your child can be a difficult and stressful time for both parents and children. So, to prepare both you and your child for the experience, it is really important to help your child understand why they should be getting vaccinated in the first place.

Vaccines are incredibly complex, and their development process is extensive. So, explaining such a concept to your child may seem like a daunting task. Here are some examples as to how you might explain vaccines and how they work to your child.

What is a Vaccine?

Germs are things that can make us sick. And we wash our hands when we come home from doing the shopping and before we eat because we want to get rid of these germs and stay clean. Doctors and scientists work really hard to fight these germs and stop us from getting sick, so they created vaccines.

Normally, we only take medicine when we are sick. But vaccines are a little different. We get them to stop us from getting sick in the first place. They teach your body how to fight the germs so that we don't get sick.

How Do Vaccines Work?

It's a bit strange, but vaccines work by putting a little bit of the virus into your body through an injection. The little bit of the virus isn't enough to make you sick, but it does let your body know how to fight off the germs. It's kind of like a practice run, so that when/if you ever actually got the virus, your body would know how to fight it. Because your body would know how to fight it, you wouldn't get really sick.

Are They Safe?

Even though you get a little bit of the germs from the vaccine, they are still really safe because the doctors and scientists have done lots of tests to make sure that they're OK. It might hurt a little bit getting the injection, but it means you won't get really sick later on.

When it comes to vaccination time for your child or other family and friends.

You may also want to talk to your child about the possibility of them getting vaccinated against COVID-19. Even though it may be quite a while before children will be receiving vaccines (pending results of clinical trials currently underway, and availability of vaccines), now is a good time to begin the conversation and reduce levels of anxiety when the time comes for them to visit the GP, especially given that adults in their life may be getting vaccinated soon.

Here are some overall tips for talking to your child about vaccines, and specifically the COVID-19 vaccine.

1. Start the conversation early.

Especially with the abundance of talk about the COVID-19 vaccines currently in the media, and potentially family members already receiving COVID-19 vaccines, it can be a great time to begin talking about vaccines. Starting the conversation early helps reassure your child that it is a normal and safe process. It also gives them time to ask any questions and express any worries they may have.

2. Manage Expectations.

Even though we would all like the world to go back to normal as soon as everyone gets the vaccine, this may not be the case. We may still need to follow certain restrictions and guidelines, and things may not open up as quickly as we may like.

3. Bring up the topic often

The more your child hears about vaccines and the COVID-19 vaccine in particular, the more comfortable they should come with the idea of getting the injection. It doesn't need to be brought up all the time, but if it comes up in conversation, or a child hears it on the news, it can be good to draw their attention to it and see if they have any questions.

4. Describe the process of getting the vaccine

It is much easier for your child to prepare for getting the vaccination if they know what to expect. Tell them that they'll probably have to go into the doctor, and they will give them a little injection. Acknowledge that it might be a little sore, but maybe have a treat ready for after they receive the injection. It may also be useful to talk about this when a close family member is getting their injection. If it is a grandparent or even yourself, tell them about how

it went and what you had to do. Being well informed is a really useful way to reduce the chance of your child getting overwhelmed when the time comes.

Please see [hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie) for more information on vaccines and the COVID-19 vaccination process.

Check out our website for more resources www.autism-toolkit.ie