

Nervous about needles? Information for families

Lots of children and young people (and adults) are nervous about having injections or blood tests taken with a needle. We are often asked about how to make things easier so we have collected ideas for this information sheet from the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) play team, who have many years of experience working with children, young people and families in hospital. If you have any ideas of your own or particular activities that work with your child, please contact us to tell us about them.

Being nervous about needles can affect anyone at any age for various reasons.

- Some people develop this fear as a result of a previous experience. For example, they may have felt unprepared or there may have been more than one attempt to find a suitable vein.
- Others may have seen or read about injections or having blood tests and may have not fully understood what happens.
- Fears can also develop if negative feelings are picked up from someone else, such as a friend, brother or sister, or parent.

All of these are valid reasons for being nervous, but there are ways to improve the situation for everyone – try some of the following suggestions to see what suits your child best.

Talk to us

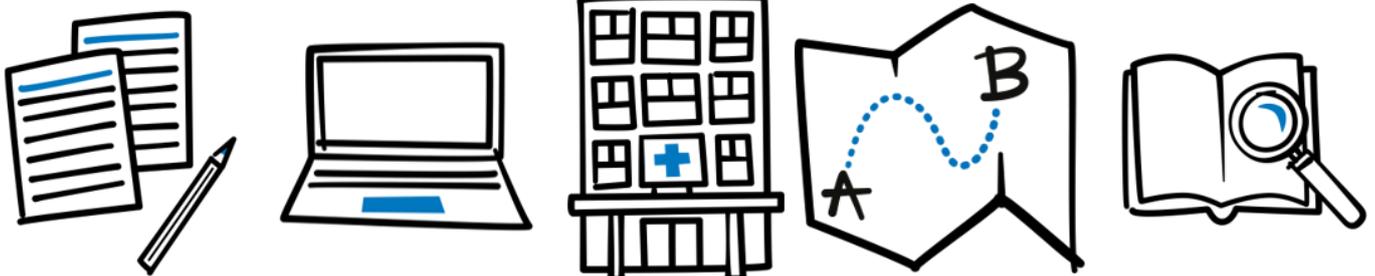
- If your child is has an appointment or admission where they may need to have an injection or blood test, tell us beforehand that your child is nervous.
- If your child has had injections or a blood test before, think about how they reacted. Was

there a particular part of the process that worried them?

Knowing how your child has reacted before can help us reduce their worries this time.

Getting ready beforehand

- Not knowing why an injection or blood test is needed and what will happen can be frightening for some children. Explain as best as you can how and why the doctors think an injection or blood test will make your child better or check their treatment.
- Use play to talk about the whole process of taking a blood test, perhaps using a teddy or doll as the 'patient'. You could put a dab of cream on teddy's hand to explain the anaesthetic cream, use a ribbon as a tourniquet and talk about importance of keeping their hand and arm still.
- Some hospitals, including GOSH, work with an organisation called Harvey's Gang to help children and young people cope better with injections and blood tests by taking them on a tour of the laboratory to see what happens



there. If you think your child would find this helpful, talk to the Play team or Pals Office.

- When and how you tell your child about the injection or blood test will vary depending on their age and understanding. You know your child best so tailor the information to their needs and level of understanding, but make sure that it is truthful.

For instance, adults may say "There will just be a small sting when the needle goes in".

However, if a child has experienced being stung by a wasp or, alternatively, if they have no experience of this, using these words may make preparing them more difficult or confusing.

- There may be times when there are few choices or options around injections or blood tests or when there is little time to prepare your child. There may still be some choices around certain aspects of the process though.

Offering choices will help your child to feel more in control – although these choices must be achievable.

For example, your child may be able to choose whether to have the procedure sitting up, laying down or sitting on a parent's lap.

- Discuss what you will do after the procedure with your child. It can be a simple treat, such as a trip to the park or to the shop to buy a drink. This helps let your child feel they have had some choice and also have something nice to focus on while the procedure is taking place.

On the day

- We offer local anaesthetic cream or a cold spray to children having an injection or blood

test. They both work by numbing the surface of the skin so the needle does not hurt as much when it is inserted, although it does not completely remove the feeling.

Some children are told that the cream is 'magic' so they will not be able to feel anything. This is not entirely true. We suggest that you say that they might feel some pressure, pushing or holding - but do not promise that it will not hurt.

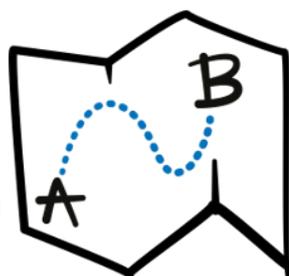
- Unless you have a particular fear of needles yourself, the best option for your child is that you are with your child when they have their injection or blood test.

Younger children are often happier to sit on a parent's lap because it feels a 'safe' place for them. Even with older children, try to sit close enough to your child to hold hands or hug and reassure them.

- If you would prefer not to be with your child for their injection or blood test, please bring a friend or relative with you so that someone can stay with your child and comfort them.
- We would always recommend children being supported by play specialists if they require invasive procedures (such as an injection or blood test) that may be uncomfortable or physically challenging.

The play specialist may use play as distraction to help your child – the idea is that by taking a child's mind off what is happening, the pain and fear associated with it will reduce. Any activity that takes a child's mind away from what is happening is worth trying. Some things that may be useful include:

- Playing 'I Spy' or noticing things in the room or out of the window
- Talking about familiar people, pets, places or a happy memory



- Singing
- Deep breathing

At GOSH, we have developed an app called Blood Quest, which your child can use during their injection or blood test.

- It is not always helpful to tell children to 'be brave' when having an injection or blood test. We do not mind children shouting or crying during a procedure although, if you think they will struggle to cope, it would be helpful if you could warn us beforehand.

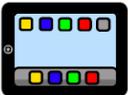
Afterwards

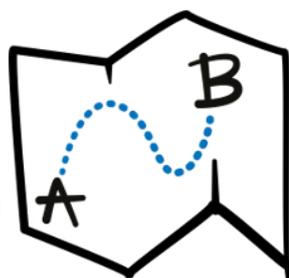
- Think about how the injection or blood test went.
- When they are calm, perhaps talk to your child about the procedure. What worked and what was less helpful?
- Remember this for next time and pass this information on to the play team so that we can support your child in the future.
- Talk to our Play team about other suggestions for helping your child if they are nervous about needles.

Further information and support

If you have any questions, please call the Play Department on 020 7829 8849.

Having a blood test

	Your doctor or nurse has asked you to have a blood test. They will take a small amount of blood to check.
	Our lab staff will look at the blood under a microscope (said: my-cro-scope). They can look at your blood cells very carefully and count them. This helps the doctors work out how to look after you.
	We will put some cream on your skin before we take the blood sample to make your skin numb. This means the needle will not hurt so much.
	If you are older than 5, you could have some cold spray. This works quicker than the cream. It also makes your skin numb.
	You could play a computer game too. You can help by thinking about something nice.





We will put a band around your arm. This may be a bit tight.



They will quickly put a small needle into a vein and take a small amount of blood. As soon as they have enough blood, they will take out the needle.



You can choose whether to have a plaster or not.



We will write your name on the bottle and also fill in a form.



When our lab staff have looked at your blood, they will tell your doctor what they have found.



Please ask us if you have any questions.

