

Five Ways to Prepare Your Child for a Biologic Injection

Use the information below from our child life specialists to help ensure that your child's upcoming injection goes as smoothly as possible.

What is a biologic?

Biologics are medications that are used to prevent and treat many health conditions. Biologics such as Dupixent[®], Fasenra[®], Tezspire[®], and Nucala help treat severe asthma. While many parents are eager to start a biologic for their child to help with this condition, it can cause anxiety for kids who are afraid of needles. Biologics are given by a **subcutaneous injection** (a needle poke just below the surface of the skin).

Typically, your child will come in for an appointment to receive their first biologic injection. Our nurses will educate you and/or your child's caregiver on how to give the injections so that your child will continue receiving regular injections at home after their first one.

In addition to planning when and where your child will receive their first biologic injection, you can start preparing them by talking about what to expect at their appointment and what to expect of future injections at home.

When should I tell my child about their upcoming injection?

We recommend talking to your child approximately one week before their planned injection. However, you know your child best. Some may require more or less time to prepare. The most important thing is that you tell them beforehand to avoid a negative/surprise reaction.

Five Steps to Help Prepare your Child for an Injection:

1. Ask how your child feels about getting an injection, and what they already know.

- Before starting the conversation, make sure you have enough time and space to devote to it. Don't bring the topic up if your child is hungry or tired, or on a short car ride to an activity where you may be cut short. Timing is important in helping them process the information.
- Start your conversation with questions. Your child may not share their thoughts or feelings without being asked, and this gives you the chance to hear what they may already know about the injection.
- Listen to what your child says without judgement. Don't ignore statements like "Needles are scary," or use phrases like, "It's no big deal. You'll be fine." These responses may make them think their feelings are wrong.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings and allow them to express themselves, even if they're mad, sad, or tearful. Fear of needles can be normal at any age. You may want to say things like, "It's okay to feel worried. A lot of people do. All feelings are okay. It's my job to be here to help you be more comfortable." Remain calm during the conversation, validate their feelings, and make a plan so they feel supported.

Expert Tip: Avoid talking about your own or others' bad experiences with needles. This can add to any fear or anxiety your child may be feeling.

2. Inform your child of the details.

- Share logistical details with them. Tell them what will happen and where they will go for the appointment. Be detailed so they can

visualize the experience ahead of time. Share with them what they might see, hear, and feel.

- Walk your child through the steps of what to expect. Share details like the following:
 - First, we'll check in with a helper who will ask for your name. Then they may ask us to sit and wait.
 - When it's our turn, we'll meet our nurse and doctor and talk with them about the medicine.
 - The respiratory therapist will work with you to do a breathing test. After the breathing test, we will wash an area of your arm, stomach, or leg (your child may choose the site) to make sure there are no germs. This may feel cold, and the wipe might smell like hand sanitizer.
 - Next, you'll get your medicine through a small poke. You may feel a little pressure or pinch, but it will be quick. Then, you'll get a Band-Aid if you want one and that injection is done. (Be clear with your child if they must receive multiple injections.)

Expert Tip: Use kid-friendly language by choosing words like "injection" or "Dupixent®" instead of "shot." This is helpful because the word "shot" may have negative associations, either from past experiences or from confusion around the more violent definition of that word. You can also describe the feeling as a "pinch," "pressure" or "small poke" instead of words like "sting" or "burn." Refer to nurses and staff as "helpers" to make a connection that they're there to help, not hurt them with a needle.

3. Explain why they are getting the injection.

- Be concise and keep it simple.
- The child life team likes to describe an injection as a superhero shield to protect us from breathing issues caused by asthma. The

injection will teach your body to fight against asthma attacks to keep you safe and healthy.

- Most children have received other injections such as vaccines. You can reference that they've had these before, so it doesn't feel so new and scary.

Expert Tip: Talk about the injection in a positive way. Focus on how they're doing something brave.

4. Create a plan for the day of the injection.

- Do this together and give simple and attainable choices. Honor your child's need for control.
- Here are some helpful questions you can ask them beforehand:
 - Do you want to watch the poke or look away?
 - Do you want to count down or ask me or the nurse to count?
 - What could we do before and/or during the injection?
- Here are some ideas to help your child relax during injections:
 - Cuddle a stuffed animal
 - Squeeze a hand (or stress ball)
 - Listen to music
 - Watch a video
 - Breathe deeply
 - Think of a place that makes you happy and pretend you are there
 - Count numbers
 - Read a book
 - Tell a story
 - Hold a light spinner

- Your child may also benefit from certain comfort positions to help them feel safe and more in control. This can help decrease anxiety. Learn more about these positions here:
<https://www.michiganmedicine.org/health-lab/try-these-3-comfort-positions-your-childs-next-checkup>.
- Placing an alternate sensation between the “brain and the pain” can trick the nerves to focus on the alternate soothing stimuli rather than the painful stimuli. Some families benefit from ice, and others use Buzzy®, a vibrating bumble bee that can be placed above the injection site. View all Buzzy® products here:
<https://shop.paincarelabs.com/collections/all-buzzy-products>).

Expert Tip: If you’re able to, agree on something fun to do after your appointment like going to a park. This isn’t meant to be a reward for being good or something to take away if they struggle; it’s to serve as another distraction and give your child something positive to focus on during the poke.

5. Practice.

- For younger children, let them play it out. Rehearse the injection through play by using a toy syringe on a stuffed animal. Reinforce the steps you talked about previously and then ask them what would make their stuffed animal feel better. Perhaps it's the same distraction or relaxation technique your child would want to use for themselves.
- This process will help your child feel more in control. It may be something you want to do several times before the appointment.

Expert Tip: For older kids, check in with them a few times before the appointment. If you started the conversation a week in advance, ask how

they're feeling a few days before the injection. Do they still feel good about the plan? If they need to say, "I hate this" again, that's okay.

What should I do after the injection is over?

- After the injection, praise your child for their bravery. This is something that was hard for them to do and they did it. This should be celebrated.
- Compliment them on the hug they gave you during the injection, or on staying still or doing great breathwork.
- By praising your child, you're reinforcing the positive behaviors, and setting your child up for more success the next time they need an injection.

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Authors: Danielle Colliau, CCLS, Caroline Peach, CCLS, Jourdan Stiffler, BSN, RN, AE-C
Reviewers: Danielle Colliau, CCLS, Caroline Peach, CCLS, Jourdan Stiffler, BSN, RN, AE-C,
Maria Nedanovski, RN

Edited by: Amy McAlister, MSA

Adapted from: Zeichman, R., 5 ways to prepare your child for the COVID vaccine,
November 2021

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