



COVID-19 ✓**VACCINATION**

Information for health care providers supporting an adult with a needle phobia

Background

Many people may find the experience of having a needle an unpleasant one. However, for some people, the experience is much more difficult, presenting as a phobia characterised by severe and persistent anxiety and fear.

As a result, this patient group often avoid needle-related experiences. This needle avoidance extends to the area of immunisation, resulting in the individual being left susceptible to vaccine preventable diseases. This can result in further procedures involving needles should they become unwell.

Some adults with anxiety, an intellectual disability or a needle phobia may find it easier to avoid attending large scale vaccination sites for immunisation as they are loud and busy and can increase distress. They may prefer smaller settings such as a GP clinic or pharmacy.

It is important to discuss with your patient, their family, carer or support provider, an individualised plan for how to approach the immunisation experience before the appointment.

Strategies to manage needle phobia and immunisation – people with autism or an intellectual disability

Healthcare providers can work with families, carers or support providers to find ways to make getting vaccinations easier.

Fears and phobias can vary from mild to severe. For milder cases, preparation and support, can help. For people with severe fears, you can discuss options for additional support or resources.

The following strategies may help in managing needle phobia in autistic people, people with intellectual disability, and other individuals with needle phobia:

- discuss the person's communication style and capabilities with their family, carer or support worker
- explain everything you are going to do using clear, plain language

- discuss consent regarding vaccinations, with the patient, family, carer or support worker
- take direction from the person as much as possible by considering their likes/dislikes
- give support and positive reassurance
- allow family, carer or support worker to attend the vaccination appointment
- remove disturbing stimuli – for example noise
- try not to stop stimming behaviours (for example rocking, flapping) that may help the individual deal with distress
- do not try to restrain the person
- older children may be very difficult to immunise due to significant needle phobias. Restraining these children can result in injury to the carer, child or health care provider
- have a low threshold to refer to a specialist immunisation provider for sedation.

Specialist phobia treatments

Specialist trained psychologists and more recently hypnotherapists have had significant success working with individuals to overcome their needle phobia. They give the person mechanisms and strategies to help overcome or manage their needle phobia. Considering either pathway is recommended as a long-term strategy to overcome needle phobia.

Disability vaccination clinics

There are many ways that people with disability, their family members and carers, and disability workers can get vaccinated, including through Commonwealth COVID-19 vaccination services. [Find out where to access COVID-19 vaccines. This includes vaccination hubs for people with disability who need low sensory spaces.](#)

Accessible state and territory

Some states and territories are offering services that make getting a vaccine easier for people with disability.

You can use the [Vaccine Clinic Finder](#) to find suitable services near you.

In-reach services

We continue to support [in-reach services for National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#) participants living in disability and aged care residential accommodation settings of 2 or more people.

Administration techniques

- prepare the vaccine out of view of the person or before they come into room
- avoid showing the person the prepared vaccine and needle prior to administration
 - place the tray containing vaccines out of sight
 - hold the vaccine to your side or behind you back until about to inject
 - encourage the person to close their eyes, look away or focus on the distraction method
- don't over discuss the needle and administration of the vaccine
 - do necessary pre-vaccination checks and side effects only
 - make the process as quick as possible to give the patient minimal time to over-think the needle

- encourage adult individuals to bring a support person if they wish
- a phobia in adolescents or adults can lead to a vasovagal or faint response. It is important that the person is supported to lay down if needed.

Sedation

If immunisation attempts are unsuccessful, a referral for immunisations to be administered under sedation may be considered.

More information

Australian Government: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/disability-sector/vaccination-clinics>

WA: <https://rollup.wa.gov.au/articles/vaccine-information-for-people-with-a-disability-or-require-additional-support>

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/top-3-covid-19-vaccine-questions-receiving-the-vaccine-if-have-a-phobia-of-needles-need-for-boosters-vaccination-for-pregnant-women>

ACT: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/stay-safe-and-healthy?a=1760515>

https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Vaccination_and_needle_phobia/

Vic: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccination-information-people-disability>

NSW: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/vaccination/get-vaccinated/accessible-vaccination-services>

Tas: <https://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au/vaccination-information/covid-19-vaccination/about-COVID-19-vaccines/information-for-people-with-disability-or-special-requirement>

QLD: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-events/news/needle-anxiety-and-proven-tips-to-help>

SA: <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/conditions/infectious+diseases/covid-19/community/covid-19+advice+for+people+with+disability>