

SUPPORTING KIDS DURING COVID-19 TESTING

Tips for Healthcare Providers

Getting a COVID-19 test can be frightening for children. The child life specialists at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) developed some tips and strategies you can use to make the testing process less stressful for your patients.

BEFORE THE TEST

- If prescreening is done, and two caregivers accompany the child, suggest that one parent ride in the backseat with the child on the way to the test.
- Using clear and specific language, guide the parent in where to sit and how to hold their child for the test (e.g., “Mom, I’m going to ask that get into the back seat with your child to comfort and firmly hold her hands.”) See the photos below for examples of how parents can support their children during the test.



- Offer choices when choices exist (*Instead of asking, “are you ready for your test now?”, try saying, “It’s time for your test, would you rather listen to your music or should I count to 10?”*)
- If you see that a patient or caregiver is angry, sad or scared, validate their feelings (e.g., *for a patient: “It is OK to feel scared. Let’s figure out a way to make this as easy as possible for you. What helps when you are upset at home?”*)
- Use simple, direct language that matched the child’s developmental age to explain the test.” (e.g. *I’m going to use this soft Q-tip to rub the inside of your nose for about 10 seconds.”*)

DURING THE TEST

- Keep the environment as quiet and calm as possible. If loud music is playing, suggest turning the volume down or turning it off.
- Depending on the child’s age, suggest the child hold a comfort item, like a favorite stuffed animal or blanket.
- Distract the child by singing; encouraging them to take slow, deep breaths; counting to 10; or playing a guessing game (*try to guess the patient’s age, favorite sport, favorite ice cream, etc.*)
- Ensure that only one person speaks at a time. Hearing multiple voices simultaneously can be overstimulating for children.
- Maintain a calm demeanor and tone of voice.
- Give the patient a job (e.g., “Your job is to squeeze dad’s hands and hold still like a statue.”)

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RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

CHOP has created a video to help children prepare for a COVID-19 test. It’s available at www.chop.edu/covid-test-prep.

AFTER THE TEST

- Praise the child for specific behaviors (e.g., “You did a great job holding still!”)
- If the child is upset after the test and space is available, encourage the parent to pull over to comfort their child.

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT THE COVID-19 TEST

It’s important to explain COVID-19 testing using words and phrases that children can understand. Below are some phrases that may be confusing to children, along with suggestions for how you can say it instead.

CONFUSING PHRASES	WHY WE SHOULDN'T USE THEM	RECOMMENDED PHRASES
“If you move, we have to do this again.”	Even if the child doesn’t move, there may need to be a second attempt.	“Your job is to keep your head very still. This will help the test feel easier and faster for you.”
“It’s OK.” OR “You’re fine.”	The child probably does not believe they are OK or fine during a painful procedure.	“It’s OK to feel this way right now. Let’s figure out a way to make it easier.”
“Don’t cry.”	Crying is OK when you’re upset.	“It’s OK to cry when you’re upset or in pain but it is really important to try to stay still.”
“Be a big girl/boy.”	This statement suggests that the child is acting immaturely by crying or reacting to something uncomfortable.	“Other kids your age tell me they feel the same way. One of my patients told me it helped when ...”
“I’m sorry.”	Saying “I’m sorry” means you are taking responsibility for doing something wrong when you are just doing your job.	“I know that was difficult, but you held very still just like we talked about.”
“It’s not going to hurt.”	It might hurt. Something that might not be painful for you could be painful for a child.	“Some kids say that it feels uncomfortable and others say that it feels like we’re cleaning their nose. I am going to try to make it as comfortable as possible. Can you tell me how it feels for you when we’re done?”