

# Children and Shots

By Suze Hargraves

He's running down the hallway at full speed. Nothing will deter him. He's got sneakers on and he knows how to use them. This spectacular athlete can even scream while running at breakneck speeds, dodging people and furniture with the agility of a gazelle. In hot pursuit are his mother and a nurse who manage to wrangle the wriggly runner just before he makes his escape. Who is this picture of athletic prowess? It's a kid running from his flu shot.

Kids don't like shots as a general rule. Honestly I don't know anyone who actually likes getting shots, but for children it can be quite an overwhelming experience. The good news is that there are ways to make the process go smoother. Dr. Lonnie Zeltzer, director of the Pediatric Pain Program at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA, gives some helpful tips on how to help your child manage pain during any injection.

1. With young children, parents can bring soap bubbles and blow bubbles during the injections with the parent suggesting they are "blowing away the hurt."
2. With a crying infant, if the parent places the plastic bubble maker in front of their mouth, as they cry out, they will make bubbles. "I have seen babies stop crying mid-cry because they were distracted by the bubbles," said Zeltzer.
3. For older children and adolescents, bubbles may not be as useful, but parents can help the child to breathe out slowly as if he/she were blowing up a big balloon.
4. Guide the child to use their imagination to experience being somewhere else really fun during the injections, such as at the park or at the beach. Other distraction ideas include jokes, video-games, stories and music.

More tips from Dr. Zelter are online at [uclahealth.org](http://uclahealth.org).

Kristy Lavertue, pediatric nurse here at White Mountain Community Health Center has developed many "shot diversion" tactics over her 37 year career. Kristy is a believer in two tactics: diversion and reward. Replacing bubbles with pinwheels (less mess!) Kristy has the child blow on the pinwheel during the injection. The pinwheel then becomes the reward. She also offers books and stickers as rewards. If your medical provider doesn't happen to have pinwheels, you can always pick one up prior to your visit!

The most important piece of advice Kristy offers is simple: know your child. Some children do better when they are prepped in advance by a parent or guardian for what will happen during an office visit. Others respond better to information either coming from the provider or simply in the medical office environment. If you would like to pre-medicate your child with any sort of pain reliever, you must consult with your child's provider before doing so.

If your child does bolt for the door, cry, scream or otherwise make a scene, don't worry, don't panic and above all don't get angry with your child. Pediatric health care providers are quite accustomed to this sort of reaction and generally have many tried and true tactics to deal with the situation.

We've seen runners before and we know how to catch 'em.

Suze Hargraves is a staff member and writer for White Mountain Community Health Center, a non-profit health care provider serving the Mount Washington Valley. Call (603) 447-8900, Ext. 1, for an appointment or information.