

# Tips to support kids during COVID-19 testing

## Tips for Parents

The nasopharyngeal (NP) and throat swab tests can be uncomfortable and some children may interpret the discomfort as pain. It's natural for children to feel anxious when expecting discomfort and to be angry when feeling pain. With a few simple tips, parents can help their children feel more comfortable and remain calm before, during and after the COVID-19 test.

### Prepare

**You know your child best.** Can you tell them what to expect ahead of time? If yes, how much can you tell them? Give information at the best time for your child (e.g. a day or right before the appointment).

**Be honest about what to expect.** Be calm and matter of fact as you describe what your child may see or hear at the appointment or how they might feel. It's OK to say that the test is uncomfortable but quick (about 3 to 5 seconds).

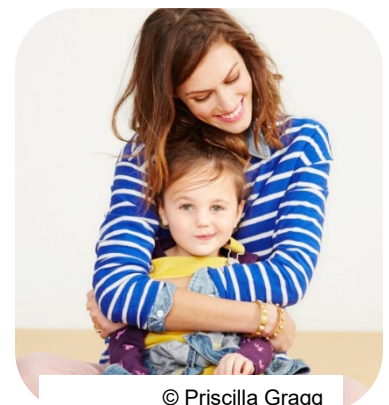
**Plan for something special to do at home after the appointment.** Planning a special activity such as playing a favorite game, watching a show, or having a treat gives your child something to look forward to (e.g. ice-cream or a popsicle after throat swab).

### Describe how a swab feels.

- NP swab: it's like having water (bath, shower, pool) up their nose.
- Throat swab: it's like gagging like when the toothbrush goes too far back.

**Practice deep breaths at home.** Slowly breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. Pretend to blow bubbles or blow out candles on a cake.

**Practice a teddy bear hug** (wrapping arms from behind) while reading or singing. This will help your child become comfortable when the hug is used during swabbing.



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## Waiting in Line

### **The testing location can be busy and noisy.**

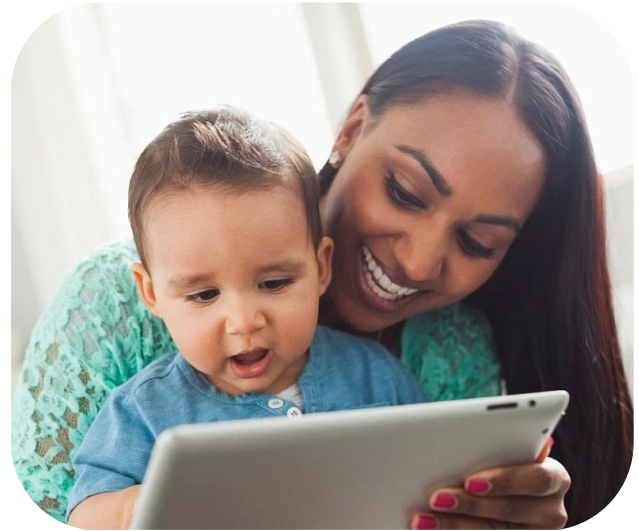
Hearing children cry can upset your child.

Acknowledge your child's feelings and label them.

You could say: "I know you're scared. It's okay to feel scared of new things. I will be right here to hold you."

**Try distractions.** Practice deep breaths to relax or bring things to help with distractions that can be easily washed or wiped clean. For example:

- Headphones to block out noise.
- A game to play while you wait.
- A cuddle toy for comfort.



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## During the Swab

### **Think about what you need to do to remain calm.**

This can be hard when your child needs a swab.

**Try to have your swab done first.** It's OK to show your discomfort.

**Stay with your child and use distractions for comfort.** Hugging a favourite washable blanket or stuffed toy, listening to music on headphones, watching a video on the cell phone, taking deep breaths, counting backwards, or telling a story can help relax your child.

**Offer choices.** For example: "Do you want to sit on your own chair or on my lap?" "Which nostril will they find the booger in?" You may also be given an option of a nose swab or throat swab.

**Give your child a job to focus on.** "During the swab, your job is to..."

- count to 10.
- hold mommy's hand very tight.
- hold your head very still.
- hum.
- wiggle your toes.

**It's OK if your child reacts.** Label their feelings, and offer encouragement and confidence:

- "I'm sorry you are sad/worried/scared/mad. I'm right here with you."
- "I know this is hard, but I know you can get through this."
- "You did so well!"

**Your child does not have to say "thank you"** to the person who did the swab.

### After the Swab

**Comfort your child.** Crying can be a healthy way to cope with strong emotions.

**It's OK for your child to be upset.** Try to remain positive even if the swab didn't go well.

**Compliment your child** on what they did well.

**Emphasize how proud you are of them** if they bring up the experience. Remind them that even though they were nervous or scared, they did it.

**Attend to what your child says.** It's OK if they have positive or negative feelings before, during, and after the procedure. Reassure and validate the feelings they share with you.

Thank you for taking your child to have a swab test done. It's not easy, but planning for the experience can help make it better for everyone.

**For more resources about COVID-19 to keep you, your family and loved ones safe, visit [ahs.ca/COVID](https://ahs.ca/COVID).**

**Follow through with the planned activity.** The reward is for going to the swabbing clinic, even if the swab test wasn't completed.

