

After a COVID-19 test: how to support your child



Having a COVID-19 test can be a breeze for some children and traumatic for others. From fear of the unknown to legitimate discomfort, children can go through a range of emotions that may leave you wondering – what do I do now?

Children are not always developmentally able to respond to factual explanations, particularly when they're scared or upset. That's why it's important for parents and carers to remain calm, listen and validate their child's feelings.

Acknowledge, using age appropriate language

- It's important not to dismiss a child's feelings by saying things like 'it's not a big deal' 'stop crying' or 'why are you making such a fuss?'. Remember, these are very real feelings for your child.
- Remain calm, always *listen* to your child, *physically* get down on their level, try and *maintain eye contact* and *acknowledge* how they're feeling. For example:
 - 'It's OK to be upset, I know that was uncomfortable'
 - 'I know you feel scared but it's over now and you will feel better soon'
 - 'Mummy's here, tell me how you're feeling and I'll listen'
- Encourage your child to ask questions as they come – it's OK if you don't know the answer, let them know you'll ask the nurse/doctor.

Physically comfort and support

- Never underestimate the power of a hug! Children want to feel safe and supported and when in pain or scared, they will often retreat to a loved one.
- Depending on your child's age, you may have been able to hug your child during the

test. After the test, sit down and give your child the physical comfort they need to calm down, without any time pressure. Once they feel calm enough, ask your child if they are ready to go home. Try and maintain a physical connection, like holding their hand.

Distract and reward

- Distraction can often be the best medicine. When the time is right, offer something to your child to distract and reward them for being brave. Distraction can be as simple as singing a song your child knows the words to, or talking about a family holiday. A reward could be a special toy or comforter, or even a special drink or meal at home with you. Find something that will make your child feel special.

Explain and validate

- Whether it's the same day or two weeks later, it's important to check in with your child about having had the test, in an age-appropriate way, where you can:
 - Discuss the test and how it made them feel
 - Acknowledge their feelings
 - Explain why the test is important and how the doctors/nurses are only there to help.
- It's important to follow their lead and keep it brief, particularly if the conversation appears to be distressing them.
- You know your child best and what they need. Some children may be eager to retell the experience, as it's their way of processing their memories of the test. If that's the case, take the time to listen. If they don't want to talk about it, that's also OK. You can always try again another day, especially if you feel they need more time



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to process what's happened.

Give yourself time

Parenting is hard work. And there is simply no instruction manual for it!

It can feel impossible to make your child do something you know is uncomfortable and distressing. If you can, take some time for yourself, even if it's just 10 minutes to go for a walk, listen to music or sit down with a coffee or tea. Your child will respond to how you're feeling so it's important for everyone that you take a moment to reset, when you can.

Develop a plan – for next time

Although it may feel like you've been through a whirlwind of emotions, taking your child to have a COVID-19 test is your way of keeping them, your family and our community safe.

If your child needs another test, it's important to plan ahead and identify strategies to help you and your child.

- **TALK** to your child and make sure they're involved in the planning process.
- **ALLOW** them to identify how they can help or what their 'job' is. For example, their job is to say where they want to sit during the test and to stay still.
- **PICK** a comfort item that may help your child during the test. Empower them to choose what they want to take and even place it in a special bag they can carry.
- **DECIDE** on a reward or distraction tool. For example, if they love a particular type of meal or drink, offer that to them as a reward they can enjoy at home.

An age appropriate video on what to expect

when having a COVID-19 test is available at www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au and is a great resource to view in advance.

Seeing your child in pain is stressful and you might feel like there's no way you can go through it again. While a bad experience can be hard to forget, seeing your child ill is always harder.

If your child develops any COVID-19 symptoms, like a cough, runny nose or fever - please seek testing as soon as possible. Together, we can help stop the spread.

For more information and resources on COVID-19, visit www.health.gov.au or www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au

