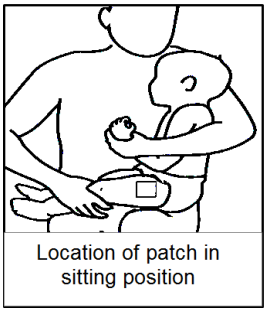
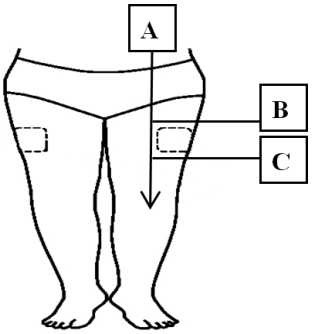
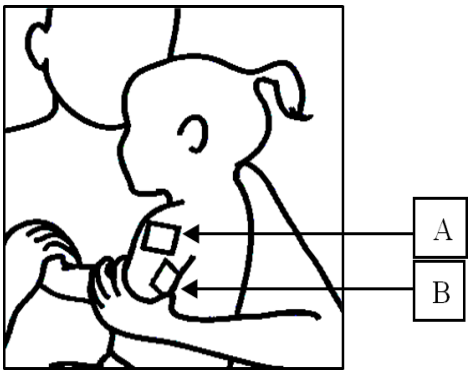
Reducing the Pain of Injections

Vaccines prevent serious diseases. Most are given by needle which can be painful and frightening for children. Here are some things you can do to reduce anxiety and pain.

1. **Make the most of mealtime:** For babies, giving the injection during breastfeeding or bottle-feeding reduces discomfort
2. **Positioning**: A child who is old enough should remain upright before, during, and after the injection. Give hugs afterwards.
3. **Don't negotiate.** Shots are a necessary and important part of your child's healthcare. You can let your child choose which toy they'd like to bring with them or let them choose a prize afterward.
4. **Listen to your child's feelings**. Let them know it's OK to be worried and dislike needles. Be realistic about how the injection will feel. *"There may be a pinch or some pushing for a few seconds."*
5. **Offer rewards:** stickers or other small prizes encourage cooperation. It is better not use food as a reward.
6. **Give praise:** especially if your child is cooperative, let them know how proud you are of them. However, don't make your child feel bad about being uncooperative.
7. **Stay with your child and be calm.** Use your normal speaking voice. Avoid high anxiety words like *hurt*, *pain*, and *shot*. Use reassuring words: *It'll be over soon,* and *You'll be OK*. You can use apology: *I'm sorry you had to go through that,* or *I know it hurts*. Avoid criticizing your child.
8. **Distract your child:** use singing, talking, bubbles, jokes, books, pinwheels, toys, and electronic devices. Distraction works better if it involves multiple senses (sight, touch, sound). A prickly pad placed around the injection site (we have these here at the office) or a cough during the injection are good tactile distraction techniques. Discuss these strategies beforehand.
9. **Numb the skin**: You can apply EMLA 5% cream to numb the skin. EMLA cream and patches are safe to use, even in infants. EMLA takes up to 60 minutes to take effect, so it must be applied at home before you leave to come for your appointment. Apply about an inch of cream over the appropriate areas (see the diagrams below), then apply the plastic dressing, or some plastic wrap, over the cream. Your child's skin may appear whiter, or redder, than usual. This is normal.







Locations for EMLA: infants to age 3, on the thighs. For children 4 years and older, use locations on the upper arm.