Coping with your COVID-19 vaccination

Information for OUH staff with a fear of needles
It is very common to have a fear of needles. If you have a fear of needles, you may be feeling anxious as you prepare for your COVID-19 vaccination. This leaflet has been written to help you recognise and manage those feelings, so that you can receive your vaccination and protect yourself from COVID-19.

**Common signs of anxiety**

- Feeling shaky
- Feeling hot
- Feeling faint or lightheaded
- Breathing faster
- A racing heart
- A dry mouth
- Fear of fainting
- Feeling sick or nauseous

**Before your appointment**

- Remind yourself why you are having your COVID-19 vaccination – to protect yourself and others.
- Distraction can help you feel less anxious – keep yourself busy by doing some exercise, having a hot drink or going outside for fresh air, if possible.
- Practise using an Applied Tension technique if you worry you are likely to faint during the appointment (see the back page).
- Practise breathing exercises (see the next page), which can be helpful if you start feeling panicky during your appointment.

**During your appointment**

- Tell the person giving your vaccination that you are feeling anxious. They will be able to help you to feel more relaxed.
- Take slow, deep breaths – use the breathing exercise you have practised.
• Try to relax the arm that will be receiving the vaccination. This will release tension in the muscles of that arm and make the injection more comfortable.

• Distract yourself from the needle:
  - count slowly
  - look away from the needle
  - have a conversation
  - look at something on your phone.

**After your appointment**

• Talk to someone (such as the vaccination centre staff) if you have any concerns.

• Reward yourself by planning a treat for afterwards.

• Remind yourself why you received the vaccination and the benefits this will bring to yourself and others.

• Reflect on what helped you to cope.

**Techniques to help you cope**

**Breathing exercise**
This simple breathing exercise can help you feel calmer before, during and after your COVID-19 vaccination. It can be helpful to start practising this exercise before the day of the vaccination.

**Preparing for the exercise**
• Make yourself as comfortable in your chair as you can.
• Remove heavy items of clothing, as these can restrict your breathing.
• Sit with your feet on the floor, hip-width apart.
**Breathing**

1. Take slow, deep breaths in and out. Let your breath flow into your belly, as if you were slowly inflating and deflating a balloon in your belly.
2. Don’t force your breathing; imagine it flowing gently in and out, like waves moving in and out on a beach.
3. Try to breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth.
4. Slowly count to five as you breathe in, and then slowly count to five as you breathe out.
5. Don’t worry if you can’t count to five at first. You can start with a smaller number and then work your way up to five, as your breaths become deeper and you feel more relaxed.
6. Keep taking slow, deep and gentle breaths while receiving your vaccination. This will help you to feel more relaxed.

**Applied Tension**

This technique is used to increase blood pressure back to normal levels to prevent fainting. It is most effective when you have practised it before the appointment. Try practising it a few times a day in the week before your appointment.

**There are three steps**

1. Sit down comfortably.
2. Tense the muscles in your arms, upper body and legs. Hold this tension for 10-15 seconds (you should start to feel warmth rising in your face).
3. Release the tension and go back to your normal sitting position.

If you have any further concerns, please contact the Centre for Occupational Health and Wellbeing:

**OccupationalHealthJR@ouh.nhs.uk**