

Supporting someone who is anxious

1 November 2021

People coming to the clinic may express anxiety because they have worries specific to the COVID-19 vaccination, or they may have pre-existing anxiety (for example, needles, being in crowds, fainting, sight of blood).

Being uncertain or overwhelmed in a situation can also create anxious feelings for people. Communication, sensory or neurodiversity related needs can increase anxiety for people coming into a novel situation such as this.

Understanding a little about how to support someone who is feeling anxious, can make you more confident and able to support them and can make their experience more comfortable.

- Think about the experience people have coming into the clinic – is it a calm and orderly environment or noisy, brightly lit, crowded and busy?
- Use your eyes and ears. If someone looks anxious (for example, agitated, pale or flushed, shaky), ask them if they are OK and whether there is anything you can do to make them more comfortable. This may be enough to find out what they are worried about, which can help you know what to do to help them.
- Ask “Is there anything that has helped you cope in the past when having a vaccination?” This might offer some clues about how to help them.
- Encourage them to breathe with long, slow, deep gentle breaths.
- If possible offer them a place to wait that is in a quieter area.
- Reassure them that it is quite common for people to be nervous when having vaccinations and that they are in very good hands with the team.
- Ask if they have any questions about having the vaccination. Trusted information can help reduce some anxiety.
- Reinforce that it is great thing that they are getting vaccinated as they are helping their friends, family and all of New Zealand beat COVID-19 and that their commitment is appreciated.
- Distraction can be helpful, so chatting about general topics can be a useful approach.

COVID-19

- Another topic for discussion can be what they plan to do after the vaccination, as this helps focus beyond the immediate and helps build the idea that they will cope and go on with their day afterwards.
- After the vaccination, acknowledge that having a vaccination when you are anxious is a brave thing to do and that it is awesome that they were able to face their fear and help New Zealand by getting vaccinated.