



Fainting During or After Immunization

What is fainting?

- Occurs during or within minutes of immunization.
- The person may complain of feeling faint or light-headed, then suddenly become pale, lose consciousness and collapse to the ground. This may be accompanied by brief clonic seizure activity (i.e., rhythmic jerking of the limbs).
- Usually managed by placing the person on their back and elevating the lower extremities.
- Recovery of consciousness and resolution of limb jerking usually occurs within a minute or two.
- The person may remain pale, diaphoretic and mildly hypotensive for several minutes.

How can fainting be prevented?

- ✓ Screening for history of fainting – Ensure you ask the client if they have ever fainted during or after a vaccine or medical procedure. If yes, they must receive their vaccine while lying down.
- ✓ CARD system – Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract.
- ✓ Immunize children before parents.
- ✓ Muscle Tension – Alternating between tensing and releasing muscles in the body (e.g. legs and stomach; not arms). Muscle tension increases someone's blood pressure prior to and during the needle. When the needle is presented, their blood pressure does not drop to a low level, thus preventing fainting.

What are the signs of fainting to watch for?

- Pale skin
- Sweat beads across their face
- Person reports feeling light-headed or dizzy or nauseous (improves once supine or head-down position)
- Skin feels cool and clammy
- Back feels hot
- They may stare and/or blink their eyes frequently or seem to not be listening and/or hearing

What do we do if someone faints?

- 1) Lay them down on the ground
- 2) Elevate their feet
- 3) Apply cold pack to the back of their neck
- 4) Monitor vitals: As a general rule, the respiratory rate is normal and not laboured but may be shallow. Cardiovascular signs include bradycardia and faint peripheral pulses but usually the carotid pulse is strong.
- 5) If vomiting has occurred or is imminent, place the client on their side. If they are pregnant, lay them on their left side.
- 6) Continue monitoring and providing support to the vaccine recipient who has fainted until signs and symptoms have stabilized.
- 7) If unconsciousness persists beyond 2-3 minutes, proceed with anaphylaxis management protocol.

When should fainting be reported as an AEFI (Adverse Event Following Immunization)?

Fainting only needs to be reported as an AEFI if there is injury (i.e., the person hits their head).

Resources

- [Canadian Immunization Guide](#)
- [CARD System](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccines for Ontario Youth Website – Providers Section](#)
- [Needle Related Fainting: Why does it happen? What to do about it? Fact Sheet](#)