

# Preparing your child with autism for a blood test



## **Before the blood test visit:**

- Use visual supports at home, school, or therapy to prepare ([www.childrensnational.org/autismvisualresources](http://www.childrensnational.org/autismvisualresources))
  - Having a Blood Test at Children's National
  - Blood Test Home Practice Kit
  - My Blood Test Visual Schedule
  - Videos (ex: [www.johnson-center.org/videos/Blood Draw.mp4](http://www.johnson-center.org/videos/Blood Draw.mp4))
  - Autism Speaks [ATN/AIR-P Blood Draw Tool Kit](#)
- Talk with your pediatrician about numbing cream for needle sticks or relaxing medication before blood draw.
- Take a tour of the blood test facility and plan a reward after blood draw visit.
- Pack a bag with comfort & distraction items, communication device, internet device, or favorite foods.
- Plan the visit on the least busy day/time of the week. Call Children's lab 202-476-5355/2096 for more info.
- Select choices below and show to the phlebotomist at the time of visit:
  - Use short simple terms without too much detail or lengthy explanation
  - Limit instructions to one step at a time; do not request multiple tasks at once
  - Use one voice to talk and provide explanations about steps of blood draw
  - Prepare and hide medical equipment until ready for use, so child does not see
  - Invite to watch or participate by demonstrating or allowing to play with equipment
  - Provide concrete choices when appropriate
  - Offer praise and reward for cooperation
  - Allow to use communication device, pen/paper, or iPad to write on
  - Use a visual schedule to communicate steps of procedure

## **During blood draw visit:**

- Environmental considerations:
  - Ask if child life, art therapy, or music therapy support is available.
  - Let the staff know if long wait times will be difficult for the child.
  - Ask if an alternative waiting area in a quiet, less busy area is available.
  - Take your child for a walk or find a clear area if your child needs movement during wait time.
- Physical considerations:
  - Use comforts holds, if possible, or ask another person to hold the arm for phlebotomist.
  - Ask if PainEase spray or buzzy is available for pain management.
  - Use distraction techniques (music, fidgets/toys, electronic device, bubbles, counting, deep breathing)
  - Avoid physically holding with force to avoid trauma and fear.
- If your child is stressed, anxious, or has challenging behavior:
  - Ask for time and space to let your child recover. Then review the process and expectations again.
  - Minimize stimulation and presence of unnecessary staff.
  - Offer reassurance and choice of favorite things or activity.
  - Bring in a new distraction (ie: light up toy, musical fidget, tablet, etc).
  - End the visit if your child is unable to cooperate without force. Contact Beyond the Spectrum to plan next visit: 202-476-2884 or [BeyondtheSpectrum@childrensnational.org](mailto:BeyondtheSpectrum@childrensnational.org)

## **After the blood draw visit:**

- Inform child all done and move on to next activity.
- Provide your child with a reward. (ex: stickers, toy, food, praise, activity, etc.)
- Take note of what worked and what didn't to prepare for the next blood test visit.