COVID-19 testing for babies and toddlers

This handout explains what will happen when young patients come to the COVID-19 Assessment Centre at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

Your doctor has decided that your child needs a nasal swab to rule out the possibility that your child has COVID-19. Even though COVID-19 infections in young children are rare, testing will provide your doctor with the information needed to provide the best care for your child.

What is a nasal swab?

A nasal swab – called a nasopharyngeal swab – is a test done to collect a mucus sample from the inside of your child's nose.

What will happen during a nasal swab?

1 The nurse will ask you to comfort your child by holding them in your lap or arms. You can help your child be still for the test by wrapping your arms around them in a comforting hug.

2 The nurse will place the swab inside your child's nose and gently wiggle it around for about ten seconds.

What does a swab feel like?

A swab can feel bothersome to some children, but it will be over quickly. The swab may cause your child's eyes to water or make them feel like sneezing. It is natural for a baby or young child to turn their head away from the swab, so a nurse may help by cradling your child's head.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

You will be asked to put on a mask when you arrive for your test. Children under the age of two do not need to wear a mask. The nurse will also wear a mask plus a gown, gloves, and face shield to keep you both safe from each other's germs.

How you can make the swab more comfortable for your child

For toddlers:

- Hold your child on your lap
- Speak in a calm and soothing voice
- Sing your child's favourite song
- Distract your child with a video on your phone or tablet
- Provide encouragement and praise success
- Bring a comfort item from home, such as a stuffed animal or blanket

For infants:

- Swaddle your child in a cozy blanket
- Offer breastfeeding, a bottle, or a soother before and after the test

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