

Feeling nervous talking to your doctor? These 5 tips can help

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LEXINGTON — No matter how old you are, talking to a doctor or nurse can be stressful. Whether it's for a routine wellness visit or in the event of illness or injury, many people feel nervous, anxious, or unsure of what to say. But it's important to communicate with your healthcare team. The more you tell them, the more they understand and can help. Some strategies can help you better communicate with your providers, even at a young age.

Here are a few tips you can try at your next visit or use to support your child in navigating communicating with providers:

Start small. If talking to doctors feels overwhelming, you don't have to jump into a long conversation right away. Start small. Try making eye contact, giving a simple "hello," or answering yes/no questions. As you get more comfortable, you can work your way up to asking questions or sharing more about how you're feeling.

Take notes and practice. When we're nervous, it's easy to forget what we wanted to say. Writing down your questions or concerns before your appointment can help you stay on track. You might also find it helpful to practice what you want to say with a trusted family member or friend. Younger kids might practice conversations while

engaging in medical play, taking turns acting like the doctor and patient. Rehearsing can help you feel more prepared and avoid the feeling of frustration when you leave your appointment and realize there was more you wanted to say.

Bring a support person. Having a trusted family member or friend with you can be a big help. Having someone there that makes you feel safe can help you feel more comfortable. They can also remind you of things you wanted to ask, support you if you get overwhelmed, or even speak up for you if you're not ready to talk. Younger kids can come up with a signal or "code word" to let their caregiver know when they need a break or

want them to take the lead.

Take deep breaths. Before your appointment, take a few minutes to focus on your breathing. This can slow down your heart rate and help your body feel more relaxed. Inhale slowly, take a brief pause, and then exhale slowly. Repeat this a few times to help calm your nerves. You can teach younger kids to take deep breaths too. You can ask them to pretend to smell flowers and then blow out candles.

Bring coping items. Comfort items can make a big difference during medical visits. Things like stress balls, fidget toys, or for younger kids a favorite stuffed animal can help you feel more at ease. Even clicking a

ballpoint pen or fidgeting with a ring on your finger can provide a much-needed distraction, especially while you are waiting at the office. These items give your hands something to do and can make you feel safer and more in control.

These tips can help you take small steps toward feeling more comfortable and being an advocate for yourself on your healthcare journey. However, it's okay to ask for help and if your level of distress is interfering with your ability to seek care or you want more support, a mental health professional can help address your specific concerns. Being open with your healthcare team can help you get the best care possible.

Health officials confirm 2 whooping cough deaths in young infants

FRANKFORT — Last week, state health officials with the Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) announced that two infants have died from pertussis (whooping cough) in the commonwealth in the last six months. Neither the infants nor their mothers had received the recommended immunizations against pertussis during pregnancy or infancy. These are the first pertussis-related deaths in Kentucky since 2018. Health officials urge all Kentuckians to remain up to date on recommended pertussis immunizations and emphasize the importance of maternal immunization during pregnancy and for all infants beginning promptly at 2 months of age.

"Anyone can get whooping cough, but infants are at greatest risk for life-threatening illness," said KDPH Commissioner Dr. Steven Stack. "Fortunately, when vaccinations are administered to pregnant women, it pro-

vides protection to both the mother and the baby."

Whooping cough is a very contagious respiratory illness. Symptoms of whooping cough can vary for people based on their age and vaccination status but typically begin with a runny or congested nose and mild coughing. After 1-2 weeks, the cough can progress to rapid, violent coughing fits that can cause the "whooping" sound, vomiting and labored breathing. Babies younger than 1 year old are at greatest risk for developing severe complications from whooping cough. Young infants may not initially present with classic symptoms of pertussis and may not even have a cough—instead they may just struggle to breathe or stop breathing. People with pre-existing health conditions that may be worsened by whooping cough are at high risk for developing a severe infection.

Health officials announced in July 2024 that whooping cough

cases had begun increasing in Kentucky to levels not seen in over a decade. There were 543 cases of whooping cough reported in Kentucky in 2024, the highest number of cases in the commonwealth since 2012. Already, 247 cases of whooping cough have been reported in Kentucky this year. Health officials anticipate that whooping cough will continue to increase during the summer and fall, based on historic trends. Many U.S. states and other countries are also experiencing elevated levels of whooping cough.

Whooping cough spreads easily from person to person through the air. People can spread the bacteria from the start of symptoms and for at least two weeks after coughing begins. Some people have mild symptoms and don't know they have whooping cough, but they can still spread the bacteria to others. Many babies who get whooping cough are infected by older siblings,

parents or caregivers who may not know they have it.

If you have been exposed to anyone with whooping cough or if you are having any whooping cough symptoms, go to your nearest clinic.

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