

SMILEYSCOPE DISTRACTION FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS DURING VACCINATION

A virtual reality device is assisting staff with administering the COVID-19 vaccination to young people with special needs at Royal North Shore Hospital.

Known as the Smileyscope, the virtual reality headset takes the children on an underwater adventure, up to the stars, to the beach, or into a room with kittens to pat, and has been specifically designed to reduce patients' pain and anxiety with procedures by reframing the procedure.

Child Life Therapist Kerry introduced the Smileyscope to the Child and Adolescent Unit.

"The team has been using it with children at the vaccination clinic and the feedback has been amazing," she said.

Part of Clinical Nurse Specialist 2 Jennifer Davis' role is overseeing the Child and Adolescent Short Stay unit - where the COVID-19 vaccinations are taking place for young people with special needs.

She said the idea of the clinic 'is low stimulus and slow paced' so that the kids can get the experience to suit their needs in order to have the vaccination.

"We are seeing children with autism, intellectual delay, and severe needle phobia," Jennifer said.

"The idea is we try diversional therapy first, like Smileyscope, and then grade up as needed using different forms of sedation."

"The best thing about Smileyscope is that it brings kids to another world, so they can be removed from what's going on."



(Left to right): Marko's mum Danijela, Marko with the Smileyscope and his sister Ines

For 16 year old Marko getting an injection has never been a pleasant experience.

Marko has autism and is completely non-verbal. When the COVID-19 vaccination became available, Marko's mum Danijela sought advice from his paediatrician Royal North Shore Hospital Senior Staff Specialist Dr Helen Young.

"We were told Marko was best to come into the hospital for his COVID-19 vaccination," Danijela said.

Marko's sister Ines said they were really stressed about taking Marko for his vaccine.

"He's terrified of needles and he's a big boy now and physically resistant," Ines said.

"Last year four people were needed to hold him down so he could get his flu vaccine." With the help of Smileyscope Danijela and Ines said the whole experience has been 'beautiful'.

"All the staff have been so calm and friendly and the

Smileyscope completely distracts and relaxes him," Danijela said.

"We realised once he's relaxed the nurse needs to quickly go in with the vaccination."

Ines said Marko really loves the ocean so it was helpful to set the Smileyscope to the underwater adventure where he could see brightly coloured fish, ride a dolphin and watch a whale.

"It's also secure on the head, so Marko can't easily take it off which really helps," she said.

Danijela said the second vaccination was even easier than the first.

"The staff made this so much easier for us and were so understanding of Marko's specific needs - and I can't believe how well the Smileyscope works for him," she said.

"Now he is double vaccinated we are confident to go out again."