

## **Phlebotomy Age Specific Competencies**

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Blood collections on young and elderly patients is technically and emotionally challenging for the health care worker. The young patient poses problems due to size and because they are less emotionally and psychologically prepared to cope with pain. The elderly or geriatric patient will present with physical and emotional problems that can be challenging. The purpose of this exercise is to prepare the phlebotomist to recognize problems unique to the different age groups. After completing the following reading the health care worker will be able to:

1. Recognize fears or concerns that children in different developmental stages might have toward the blood collection process.
2. List suggestions that might be appropriate for parental behavior during a venipuncture or skin puncture.
3. Define the physical and emotional changes that are associated with the aging process.
4. Recognize the physical and emotional changes associated with the elderly.

**Click on the following topics for age specific guidance.\***

- A. [Fears and Concerns](#)
- B. [Communication](#)
- C. [Comfort](#)
- D. [Safety](#)
- E. [Parent Behavior](#)

\*From Phlebotomy Handbook: Blood Collection Essentials by Diana Garza and Kathleen Becan-McBride

### **I. Specific Interventions for the Elderly:**

- Be patient, kind and courteous
- Allow adequate time
- Hold the open button on elevator for exiting
- Ask if you can help, do not assume everyone wants your help

#### **A. Assist visually impaired**

- Identify yourself
- Speak normally, don't shout
- Speak directly to the person
- Explain any procedure being done

#### **B. Assist hearing impaired**

- Speak at your normal rate - not too rapidly
- Face the person
- Never speak directly into the person's ear
- Include the person in all discussions about him/her
- Treat the person as an adult

### C. Physical and physiologic changes due to normal aging that may impede specimen collection

Process	Physical or Physiologic Change
Body mass shrinkage	Loss of skeletal muscle mass
Skin changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinning of dermal layers</li><li>• Vein and subsurface discoloration</li><li>• loss of elasticity</li><li>• De-pigmentation or whitening</li></ul>
Blood vessel changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fragile tiny subsurface blood vessels</li><li>• superficial bleeding</li><li>• loss of elasticity</li><li>• narrowing due to atherosclerosis</li></ul>
Joint stiffening	Loss of mobility and inability to straighten extremities
Vision changes	Eye lens changes causing difficulty in near focusing
Hearing changes	Decreased sensitivity to all sounds Inability to comprehend conversation amid other noise
Continence level	Uncontrollable urinary or fecal loss
Hormone loss	Cutaneous atrophy, dehydration

### D. Phlebotomy Procedures

1. Collection of specimens may require extra time, be patient
2. Maintain a pleasant, professional demeanor
3. Show respect for the privacy of the elderly patient, even when circumstances are difficult
4. Wash hands between patients
5. Speak clearly and directly to geriatric patients to help them discriminate sounds
6. Focus light directly on objects to enable geriatric patients to see materials as clearly as possible
7. Identify procedure to be performed
8. Recognize fragile, tiny veins in the arm, wrist and hand and select appropriate equipment for collection (use 22 or 25 gauge needle)
9. Determine minimal amount of specimen and sample amounts
10. If bruising is apparent, select a site that has none
11. Avoid areas where rashes, scabies, edema and scaly skin are present in order to prevent irritation and contamination
12. Use tourniquet that fastens instead of one that has to be tied
13. Avoid palpating the arm too vigorously. do not flick the skin
14. Insert needle carefully; avoid probing for a vein
15. Take care when applying tape and remove tape carefully

#### References:

- Age Specific Competence: Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare organizations; 1998
- Laboratory Issues Regarding Geriatric Patients; Laboratory Medicine, Volume 28:7, July 1997; pages 458-461
- Collecting Specimens from the Elderly Patient: Laboratory Medicine, Volume 28:8, August 1997, pages 518-522

## Fears and Concerns

0-6 months	6-12 months	1-3 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-17 years	Special problems or Mental disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total dependent on and trusts parents and other adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear of strangers</li> <li>Fear of separation from parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-centered</li> <li>Fear of injury</li> <li>Fear of long separation from parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-centered</li> <li>Fear of injury</li> <li>Enjoys pretending and role playing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less dependent on parents</li> <li>Fear losing self-control</li> <li>More willing to participate</li> <li>Tries to be independent</li> <li>Curious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively involved in anything concerning the body</li> <li>more independent</li> <li>Embarrassed to show fear</li> <li>needs privacy</li> <li>May act hostile to mask fear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fears are similar to the behaviors of the developmental level</li> <li>Need relaxed, gentle approach</li> </ul>

## Comfort

0-6 months	6-12 months	1-3 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-17 years	Special problems or Mental disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep patient warm</li> <li>Warm site of puncture if needed</li> <li>Parent may hold child</li> <li>Use very gentle approach</li> <li>Use of a distraction, such as a light pen, key ring, or bell, may minimize fear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep patient warm</li> <li>Warm site of puncture if needed</li> <li>Allow familiar health care worker to perform procedure</li> <li>Allow parent to be in close proximity</li> <li>Allow child to use pacifier or other comforting items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep patient warm</li> <li>Warm site of puncture if needed</li> <li>Allow parent to be in close proximity</li> <li>Allow child to use comforting items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow child to have familiar things or people near by</li> <li>Give them time to verbalize their fears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try not to embarrass the child</li> <li>May want parent to hold their hand</li> <li>Take it slowly, allow time for repeat questions</li> <li>Allow child input on decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain privacy</li> <li>Take extra time for explanations and or preparation</li> <li>offer them the opportunity to have parent close by</li> <li>Give them time to recover after the procedure if they have cried</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use strategies that are appropriate for the developmental stage</li> </ul>

## Communication

0-6 months	6-12 months	1-3 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-17 years	Special problems or Mental disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself to caregiver</li> <li>Explain procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself to caregiver</li> <li>Talk slowly to infant</li> <li>Try to make eye contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself to caregiver and child</li> <li>Child will understand simple commands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself</li> <li>Talk to child in simple terms</li> <li>Allow child to touch equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself</li> <li>Child may be interested in health concepts "Why" and "how".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself</li> <li>Use adult vocabulary, do not talk down</li> <li>Explain procedure tho-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use strategies that are appropriate for the developmental stage</li> </ul>

## Communication

0-6 months	6-12 months	1-3 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-17 years	Special problems or Mental disabilities
	with infant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and may choose to cooperate</li> <li>Take it slowly, do not rush patient</li> <li>Allow child to touch supplies</li> <li>Ask parent to also explain procedure in familiar terms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try using familiar cartoon characters in the explanation</li> <li>Perhaps use toys to demonstrate procedure</li> <li>Child may pretend he or she is doctor and will "help" with the procedure</li> <li>Provide tokens for bravery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain why the blood is needed</li> <li>Involve child in the procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>roughly</li> <li>Ask if he or she would like to help with the procedure</li> <li>Ask what might make them more comfortable</li> <li>allow time for questions or to handle supplies</li> </ul>	

## Parent Behavior

0-6 months	6-12 months	1-3 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-17 years	Special problems or Mental disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent may hold child as an aid to the phlebotomist and to provide comfort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent may assist by holding, explaining to and comforting the child</li> <li>Parent may help identify comforting toy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Parent may assist by holding, explaining to and comforting the child</li> <li>*Parent may help identify comforting toy</li> <li>*Encourage parent to praise child after procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent may be present to provide emotional support and to assist in obtaining child's cooperation</li> <li>Encourage praise for bravery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child may ask parent to leave the room</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child may not want parent to be present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use strategies that are appropriate for the developmental stage</li> </ul>

## Safety

0-6 months	6-12 months	1-3 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-17 years	Special problems or Mental disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep side rails up</li> <li>Encourage parent to hold or cuddle infant after procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not separate from caregiver unless absolutely necessary</li> <li>Keep side rails up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try not to separate from parent unless absolutely necessary.</li> <li>Keep side rails up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May tolerate separation from parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use same strategies as adult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use same strategies as adult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use strategies that are appropriate for the developmental stage</li> </ul>

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