

Best Practices for COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Sites: Disability-related Accessibility

Some people with disabilities and special health needs are at more risk than others of getting COVID-19 or of getting very sick if they do get it, because they have other medical conditions. The standard of care for COVID-19 testing or vaccination should not change based on disability. Instead, it is important to keep in mind the full range of needs of people with disabilities who may face special challenges getting tested or vaccinated for COVID-19.

Many things can make it hard for some people to get tested or vaccinated: limited mobility; blindness; low vision; difficulty hearing, communicating or understanding information; and in some cases, sensory challenges. It is important to:

- Recognize that people with disabilities are diverse, as are the places they live and work. Many disabilities are not visible or immediately clear.
- Know that people with disabilities and special health needs may be more isolated and have more challenges than the general population. They may need help making an appointment and getting to the test or vaccination site. They may also need support during the test or vaccination.
- Find creative ways to safely meet their needs. People with disabilities and special health needs may need your care and attention as much and maybe more than others.

Make testing and vaccination accessible

It is important that everyone is able to get tested when needed and vaccinated when available. This means making sure nothing gets in the way of access. Participation will improve for everyone by paying attention to these details:

- **Physical ease of access:** Make sure the space is easy to get to and to move around inside for people with limited mobility and those who use wheelchairs, walkers, and other aids to get around. People who have low vision or are blind need a clear path of travel that is smooth and free of all barriers. Have someone at the door to ask people if they need any help or support getting tested or vaccinated. Always ask if someone needs help. Never assume that someone needs help and do not give help unless asked.
- **Sensory ease of access:** Some people with disabilities, such as autism, or people who suffer after a trauma, may be sensitive to lights, sounds, smells, or the physical touch that testing and vaccination requires. Limiting the time they must wait is critical. A separate, more private space may be needed. Be patient and sensitive, taking into account each person's individual needs.
- **Cognitive ease of access:** Give clear information about what will be done and how it will be done. Explain all the steps. This information should be available in different formats and in plain language; a visual storyboard can help to improve understanding. Give people the time they need to understand the information. Know that you may need to wait a little longer for a response. For testing, a swab is likely the easiest way to collect a sample when someone is unable to follow instructions that have two or more steps. Patience in all cases is the key; do not be pushy or assume you know someone's needs better than do. Understand that each person and their individual needs may be different.

- **Technological ease of access:** Make sure the registration program is readable with a screen reader by someone who has low vision or is blind.

Before and during an appointment

- Give people effective ways during registration to ask for sign language interpreters, forms in large print, wheelchair access, and any other accommodations. This is generally a phone number or email address.
- Train staff to ensure all people are treated with respect.
- Communicate directly with the person being served in a way that shows respect and is appropriate for their age.
- Ask someone with a disability if they need help or accommodation and what sort they may need.
- Allow extra time as needed to make sure everything is explained, answered and understood fully; do not rush.
- Ask permission to help or guide a person who is blind or has low vision.
- Allow people to bring their service animals. Do not touch or distract the animals. Keep a 6-foot distance when possible.
- Do not move someone's mobility device or personal belongings and do not help someone without asking.
- Do not touch someone without asking.

Improving physical access

Parking

- Make sure least one of every 25 parking spaces is accessible parking. These spaces should be clearly marked if people are to park and leave their vehicles to get tested or vaccinated. Spaces may be marked temporarily, if needed.
- Accessible parking spaces must be 8 feet wide, with an access aisle that is also 8 feet wide. Access aisles must be marked "no parking." Accessible parking spots must have a sign posted with the universal symbol of access. It must say "vehicle ID required" and say how much the fine is for parking illegally.

Routes and entrances

- Accessible routes and sidewalks must have a curb cut or curb ramp that is at least 36 inches wide with a stable, smooth, and slip-resistant surface and a slope no greater than 1:20 (5%). A portable ramp is acceptable.
- Clean and clear paths. In the winter, make sure paths are shoveled and salted
- Registration and signage
- The registration table or reception counter should be no more than 36 inches high, with a clear floor and leg space for a wheelchair and moveable chair to allow someone to sit if needed.
- Readable signs with large font, high contrast colors, and a non-glare finish are important.

Restrooms

- If restrooms are provided, accessible restrooms should include an accessible toilet stall at least 78 inches deep and 60 inches wide; a toilet the height of 17 to 19 inches; and grab bars.
- If portable restrooms are used or facility restrooms are inaccessible, an accessible portable restroom must be provided.

Effective communication practices to improve access

Be prepared to communicate in different ways. Be aware that masks can make communication harder. Always ask someone how they want to communicate.

- Print standard questions, instructions, and descriptions of procedures. Have standard questions in large print or Braille.
- Consider having clear masks available for staff to communicate with people who would benefit from reading lips or seeing a face more clearly.
- Give clear instructions, both verbal and written, with step-by-step procedures.
- Have a small, dry erase board for interactive conversations.
- A phone or tablet can be used to access communication apps.
- Have pictures available or demonstrate testing and/or vaccine procedures using visual cues.
- Provide written materials in high-contrast large print (16-point font or larger) or in electronic format.
- Read instructions aloud, if needed.