

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.