Considerations for Disability Access for Vaccinations

People with disabilities are diverse and many disabilities are not visible or immediately clear. Many things can make it hard for some people to get vaccinated: limited mobility; blindness; low vision; difficulty hearing, communicating or understanding information; and sensory needs. People with disabilities and special health needs may experience more barriers than the general population in accessing vaccine appointments and services. With this in mind, it is important to recognize that accommodations or changes may be necessary in order for people with disabilities to have access.

# Make Vaccinations Accessible

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

* Physical Access:
	+ Spaces should be easy to enter and to move around inside.
	+ Accessible entrances, rooms, restrooms, and path of travel are a must.
	+ Clear pathways of travel and free of barriers.
* Sensory Access:
	+ Quiet and calm spaces with gentle lighting can reduce barriers.
	+ Private vaccination spaces, slower paced appointments, and limited wait times are also helpful.
* Cognitive Access:
	+ Provide clear information about what will happen, where and how.
	+ Ensure sign ups, registration, and forms are easy to navigate.
	+ Provide information in plain language; a visual storyboard can also help to improve understanding.
* Technological Access:
	+ Make sure they are accessible with a screen reader for those who are blind or low vision.
	+ Also offer non-online options for those without internet or computer skills.

# Before and During an Appointment

* Give people effective ways during registration to ask for accommodations (ex: sign language interpreters, forms in large print, wheelchair access, more time, etc.).
* Ask if help or accommodations are needed, and what sort of accommodation they may need.
* 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. Ask permission to help or guide a person who is blind or has low vision.
* Communicate directly with the person being served in a way that shows respect and is appropriate for their age.
* 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.
* Allow extra time as needed to make sure everything is explained, answered and understood fully; do not rush. Know that you may need to wait a little longer for a response.

# 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, with step-by-step procedures. Explain what you are going to do and how you will do it. Some people may need instructions written out; others may benefit from pictures, gestures, or demonstrations.
* 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.
* Read instructions aloud, if needed.
* Be prepared to slow down. Some people may need more time to process or finish their sentence.

# More Ways to Improve Access

* Some people may be unable to wear a mask due to their disability. This should not block them from being vaccinated. If masking is a concern, consider creative solutions such as offering “drive up” vaccinations to individual’s in their car.
* People with disabilities or special health needs may need a support person to help during the vaccination process. They may choose to stay together during their appointment.
* People have the right to bring service animals with them.
* For anyone, but especially people with disabilities and their caregivers, information about testing, vaccinations, and what to expect during the process is critical. Provide this information in advance, in plain language and in a format that the person can understand.
* Make sure that vaccination areas are easy to enter, navigate and exit, including for people in wheelchairs, scooters, canes, and walkers.
* Communicate directly with a person, even if using an interpreter. Unless the person’s hearing is limited and they request it, be aware that talking loudly can be unhelpful, offensive, or even harmful to those who have sensory sensitivity.
* Use a lot of verbal communication with people who are blind or who have low vision. Let them know when you are reaching toward them, what you are planning to do next, etc. Ask permission before you touch them.