COVID-19 Vaccinations: Know Your Rights!

- People with disabilities sometimes have trouble accessing COVID-19 vaccines.
- Both public and private vaccine providers must modify their programs to remove barriers for people with disabilities who want a vaccine. This includes physical barriers and communication barriers.
- **Reasonable accommodations** help people with disabilities access vaccinations. The law requires this so everyone can have equal access to vaccines if they want.
- **Who must comply?** Any place that provides vaccines to people. This includes all state and local governments, hospitals, health clinics, physician offices, nursing homes, pharmacies and more.
- The federal laws that require this include the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Affordable Care Act.
- **Examples** of reasonable accommodations that might give equal access to vaccines include:
  - Bringing a caregiver, staff, or support person with you to your appointment.
  - Providing private waiting areas with not many lights or noises.
  - Allowing headphones or fidget toys during your appointment.
  - Having a sign language interpreter available during your appointment.
  - Getting help communicating with others during your appointment.

- At your appointment, there must be **good communication**, so you understand things. Some things that might help how you communicate with others include:
  - Having printed materials in Braille, large print, or formats for screen readers.
  - Having videos captioned, with audio descriptions.
  - Having sign language interpreters, and other interpreters, at your appointment.
  - Using a computer or white board to communicate.

Here are tips for requesting an accommodation to help make your vaccination accessible.

- Prior to your appointment, call ahead to ask if they offer the accommodation you need.
- If they don’t, explain the accommodation you’d like and how it will help you.
- If needed, ask if you can make your request in writing, and how to email them.
- Bring their answer with you to your appointment, to remind them.

This information is provided by Disability Rights Florida (DRF) for educational purposes and does not constitute legal advice. For more information, or to request assistance arranging accessible transportation to a vaccination appointment, scheduling a vaccine appointment or reminder, or reporting other difficulties related to vaccine access, please contact DRF toll-free at (800) 342-0823, or through TDD at (800) 346-4127. www.DisabilityRightsFlorida.org
Preventing Discrimination in COVID-19 Vaccinations for People with Disabilities

• Since 2020, the COVID-19 virus has affected many parts of our lives. It has affected older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals from communities of color even more severely. Although vaccinations are now available to provide potentially life-saving protections from the COVID-19 virus for all adults and some adolescents, people with disabilities often face barriers in accessing the vaccine.

• Both public and private entities must modify their vaccination services to remove physical barriers, communication barriers, and other barriers to becoming vaccinated. Such modifications are required so long as they do not “fundamentally alter” the services being provided or otherwise create an “undue burden.”

• Reasonable accommodations help people with disabilities access and benefit from vaccination programs. Equal access to vaccine programs is required by law.

• Reasonable accommodations can be made to physical spaces, programs and rules to enable people with disabilities to have equal access.

• There are both state and federal laws that require the provision of reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities when needed to prevent disability discrimination, including:
  • The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
  • Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and
  • Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act.

Who must comply:
• All state and local governments
• Hospitals and health clinics
• Tribal health centers
• Physicians’ offices
• Urgent care centers
• Nursing homes
• Congregate care facilities
• Pharmacies

• To help prevent discrimination in their vaccination processes, providers can simplify the vaccination process, including:
  • Limiting the number of steps required to receive a vaccination appointment.
  • Simplifying the registration, scheduling, and communication processes required to get a vaccination.
  • Avoiding time-consum ing and challenging paperwork requirements that might hinder people with disabilities unnecessarily.
Examples of accommodations at the vaccination site:

- Being allowed to bring a caregiver, staff, or support person to an appointment.
- Providing adequate space and amenities for service animals.
- Ensuring sufficient accessible parking, drop-off areas, and paths of travel for individuals with wheelchairs or other mobility devices.
- Providing private, low-sensory areas for individuals seeking sensory accommodations.
- Allowing sensory objects such as fidget toys or headphones to be brought to appointments.
- Providing and permitting interpreter services during appointments when needed or requested.
- Providing and permitting interpreter services, auxiliary aids, communication devices, and other reasonable modifications needed for effective communication with healthcare and site staff.

Examples of auxiliary aids that may be required to ensure effective communication include:

- Providing printed materials in Braille, large print, or electronic formats accessible to screen reader software.
- Captioning and audio-describing videos.
- Providing sign language interpreters, language interpreters, or the Video Remote Interpreting Service.
- Using computers or pad-and-pen for simple transactions or using the Telecommunications Relay Service or Video Relay Service for telephone calls.
- Allowing use of a white board when helpful and requested.
Getting Vaccinated

People who have disabilities may have worse symptoms or need to go to the hospital if they get COVID-19. This is because some health problems make it harder to fight COVID-19. Here is information to help you decide if you want a COVID-19 vaccine.

How does the COVID-19 vaccine work?

- Most COVID-19 vaccines come in two shots. They are given one at a time, at least three weeks apart. The first shot gets your body ready, and the second shot gives you more protection. If you are told you need two shots, make sure that you get both. Vaccines will help protect you from COVID-19.

What are the side effects?

- Each of the COVID-19 vaccines may cause minor side effects. This means that the vaccine is working to help teach your body to fight COVID-19. Most of the time, these side effects will last no longer than two days. Having these side effects does NOT mean that you have COVID-19. Some common side effects are:
  - Pain (or redness) where you got your shot.
  - Sore muscles and joints.
  - Feeling tired.
  - Mild fever, chills, and nausea.

How can I make a good decision about getting or not getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Everyone has different health concerns and lifestyles. Many people with disabilities are at risk of getting sick from COVID-19. Conditions like Down syndrome, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, autoimmune disorders, and cancer can increase your risk from COVID-19. Living in a group home can increase your risk from COVID-19.

Some other things to consider:

- Do I have a condition that makes it more likely that I’ll become very sick from COVID-19?
- Do I live with, work with, or spend time with someone who is likely to become very sick from COVID-19?

Am I required to get a vaccine?

- Getting vaccinated is the best way to reduce your risk of getting COVID-19 and to prevent passing it on to others. But you are not required to get a vaccine. You have the right to receive information to help you make a decision about any medical treatment that is recommended (such as the COVID-19 vaccine).

Do I need to wear a mask after getting the vaccine?

- Even after you get your vaccine, you should continue wearing a mask that covers your nose and mouth when recommended. The vaccine helps protect you from getting very sick from COVID-19. But it doesn’t always keep you from getting COVID-19. You should keep washing your hands often and try to stay at least 6 feet away from other people that you don’t live with. If lots of people near you have COVID-19, you might want to wear your mask in public and indoors.

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What are the COVID-19 Vaccines? Are they safe for people with disabilities?

People with disabilities may be more at risk for experiencing severe symptoms and hospitalization if they contract COVID-19. This is because many individuals have other health problems that make it difficult for their bodies to fight the virus. Below is information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help you decide if a COVID-19 vaccine is right for you.

How do the different vaccines work?

- The mRNA vaccines are a new type of vaccine to protect against diseases. They teach our cells how to make a protein to trigger an immune response inside our bodies. That immune response produces antibodies to protect us from getting infected from the real virus.

- A Viral Vector vaccine uses a modified version of a different virus (the vector) to deliver important instructions to our cells. It produces a harmless piece of the virus that our immune system will not recognize. This triggers the immune system to begin producing antibodies and activating other immune cells to fight off what it thinks is an infection. Then the body has learned how to protect against that infection.

Which vaccine should I get?

- There are three COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States. Two of the vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) require 2 doses at least three weeks apart and have at least a 94% efficacy rate. The third vaccine (Johnson & Johnson) only requires one shot and has a 66% efficacy rate. None of the vaccines contain eggs, preservatives, latex, or metals.

- **Pfizer-BioNTech** COVID-19 Vaccine – type: mRNA / number of shots: two, 21 days apart
- **Moderna** COVID-19 Vaccine – type: mRNA / number of shots: two, 28 days apart
- **Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen** COVID-19 vaccine – type: Viral Vector / number of shots: one
Are the vaccines safe?

- The vaccine safety system in the United States makes sure that all vaccines are as safe as possible. All the COVID-19 vaccines used in our country have gone through the same safety tests and meet the same standards as any other available vaccines.

- According to the CDC, about 160 million people have been fully vaccinated in the United States as of August 2021. To date, less than 0.001% of fully vaccinated people in the United States have died from COVID-19.

How can I make a good decision about getting or not getting the COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone has different health concerns and lifestyles. Many people with disabilities are at risk of getting sick from COVID-19. Conditions like Down syndrome, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, autoimmune disorders, and cancer can increase your risk from COVID-19. Living in a group home can increase your risk from COVID-19. Some other things to consider:

- Do I have a condition that makes it more likely that I’ll become very sick from COVID-19?

- Do I live with, work with, or spend time with someone who is likely to become very sick from COVID-19?
What is COVID-19? How can it affect people with disabilities?

What is it?
• COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. It spreads through liquid drops from the mouth or nose when someone who has the virus coughs or sneezes. Symptoms can range from mild to severe.

How did it happen?
• COVID-19 was officially announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020. The virus spreads very fast and can make people have very serious symptoms, so the United States declared a public health emergency. In the United States, hospitals did not have enough medical information or gear at first, so many people died as a result. Scientists began to study vaccines to protect people from the virus. There are 3 companies called Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson that tested their vaccines and got approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to use.

Is it bad for people with disabilities?
• COVID-19 has affected people with disabilities, people with health issues, and older adults the worst. Some of these people may be at increased risk of getting sick with COVID-19. People with Down syndrome and intellectual and developmental disabilities are also at higher risk for severe illness and death due to COVID-19. There is increased risk of COVID-19 illness and death among people who live in facilities.

What are the variants?
• Variants are different versions of a virus. Right now, there are four primary variants of COVID-19. Their names are the Alpha variant, the Beta variant, the Gamma variant, and the Delta variant. Viruses change, but scientists are studying how they spread and the level of sickness they can cause. Scientists are also studying the effect of the COVID-19 vaccines against variants. These studies show that the vaccines work to protect people against these variants.

How can I stay safe and keep others safe?
• The more people get vaccinated, the more protected you and your caregivers, family, and community will be. Vaccinations protect us from other serious diseases like polio, measles, mumps, rubella, and whooping cough.
• Getting vaccinated is the best option to protect yourself from the virus. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (the CDC) says that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and work well, but you should ask questions and get information to help you make up your mind.
• If you are not fully vaccinated, you should wear a mask in public and especially indoors when other people are around. You should also stay 6 feet away from other people, avoid crowds, wash your hands often, cover your coughs and sneezes, monitor your health every day, and keep surfaces clean.
What Happens After I’m Vaccinated?

ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE

- Even fully vaccinated people should continue to wear a mask and practice social distancing in public, when visiting unvaccinated people, or when around people who are at increased risk or living with a person at increased risk for severe illness or death from COVID-19.

- When transmission rates are high, all people should wear a mask regardless of vaccination status and practice social distancing in public indoor spaces and crowded outdoor spaces.

- Fully vaccinated individuals should get tested and stay home if they get symptoms of COVID-19.

- All people should avoid medium to large gatherings, especially indoors, as well as unneeded travel.

TRAVELING & VACCINATION

- Fully vaccinated travelers are less likely to get and spread COVID-19.

- Before you travel, make sure you understand and follow all destination requirements related to travel, mask wearing, testing, and/or quarantine.

- Each hotel has its own policy regarding face coverings for their employees and guests. Check with your hotel before traveling regarding their face covering policy for vaccinated guests.

- Headed to a theme park? Some major theme parks are allowing vaccinated guests to remove their face coverings in select locations throughout the park. Check the theme park’s face covering policy before heading to the park.

VACCINE & HEALTH “PASSPORTS”

- Vaccine passports or health passports are not required in Florida. However, vaccine passports might be required for some international travel in the future.

- Keep your vaccination card in a safe place. Take a picture of it with your phone. If lost, contact the place that administered your vaccine or your local health department.

- “V-Safe” is an optional phone app that allows you to provide health check-ins after being vaccinated.
BOOSTER SHOTS

- COVID-19 vaccines are working very well to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death, even against COVID-19 variants. However, public health experts are starting to see reduced protection against mild to moderate disease.

- For that reason, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is planning for a booster shot so vaccinated people maintain protection over the coming months.

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (the CDC) has begun considerations for administering a COVID-19 booster shot beginning in the fall of 2021.

- This recommendation is subject to authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (the FDA), who is conducting an independent evaluation to determine the safety and effectiveness of booster doses. It is also subject to further review by the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, who will decide whether to issue a booster dose recommendation based on a thorough review of the evidence.

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