

# Successful Communication with People with Disabilities

Federal law requires covered entities—like COVID-19 testing centers, vaccination sites and other medical facilities—to ensure their staff communicate effectively with people with disabilities. There are many types of disabilities—some visible, some invisible—and each individual person has their own unique needs and preferences. The best thing to do is ask a person how you can support them during the testing or vaccination processes. Below are tips and guidelines to help you communicate effectively.

## Steps for Success

1. **Introduce yourself.** If the person has an intellectual or developmental disability, say, “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m here to help you. I’m sorry you’re not feeling well. We’ll do a quick and easy test to find out whether you have COVID-19.” Or if you are giving vaccination, “I am going to give you a quick shot to help your body learn how to protect you from COVID. I’m a (name your job). I look different from the picture on my badge because (I’m wearing PPE to stay healthy, keep others safe, etc.).”
2. **Explain the situation.** Clearly and simply explain how you will give them the COVID-19 test or vaccine, and why it is important. Explain when test results can be expected and how they will receive the results or that they will need a second shot (if applicable) and how long it will take to develop full immunity. Let them know they will have a sore arm or feel kind of achy, and that it’s completely normal.
3. **Ask about preferences.** Ask if the person has any requests for how you give them the test. Do they need help with anything?
4. **Get permission.** Ask for permission before you administer the test or vaccination.

## General Tips for Success

**Clarity.** Keep your directions clear and simple. Speak slowly and explain when the process will be over. Avoid phrases that have more than one meaning, like “this line is flying by,” as these can be confusing.

**Patience.** Be patient and repeat instructions or questions multiple times if you need to.

**Listen.** Give people time to talk and don’t be afraid to ask for clarification if you need it. If you don’t understand what someone is saying, try asking “yes” or “no” questions.

**Respect.** Talk to the person first, not the companion or attendant, unless requested. For example, if someone is using an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, look at the person and not the interpreter.

**Tone.** Remember, people meet the emotional tone you set, so smile, stay calm, and be friendly.



