

*Providing an inclusive experience for
people with autism and related conditions*


Autism Friendly Vaccine Experience Tool Kit

My Autism Guide
SIGN UP



Information
based on
your needs

guide.autismspeaks.org



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The attached materials were designed to help vaccination sites create an inclusive experience for people with autism and other related conditions and include the following tools:

“Welcoming People with Autism and Related Conditions to COVID-19 Vaccination Sites” Guide

Use this four-step environmental scan to assess your current site to identify existing accommodations as well as possible site adjustments you can make to create a more inclusive experience.

“Four Things You Can Do for People with Autism and Related Conditions” Tip Sheet

Because getting a vaccine can be challenging for people with autism and other developmental or neurological conditions, here are four things you can do now to make the vaccination experience more accessible and inclusive.

“Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine” Guide

Make this informative guide available to individuals and families to help them navigate the vaccination experience more comfortably.

Individual/Family Supports Card

Provide this helpful visual aid to individuals or families at registration or as a download pre-arrival to support them in identifying their specific support needs at the vaccination site.

The Autism Speaks Autism Friendly Vaccine Experience Tool Kit was produced with support from AshBritt Inc.



Welcoming People with Autism and Related Conditions to COVID-19 Vaccination Sites

Your Site Guide to Establishing Accessible and Inclusive Best Practices

Autism and the COVID-19 vaccine

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a condition that causes social-communication, behavioral and sensory differences. Because of this, some autistics may find COVID-19 vaccination settings challenging. Some people with related conditions, such as intellectual and neurological disabilities, also may experience challenges.

4-step environmental scan of the vaccination site

You can help create an accessible and inclusive vaccination experience by performing a 4-step environmental scan of the vaccination site to identify existing accommodations, as well as adjustments your location can make, to welcome autistic participants.

This environmental scan was developed by autism experts, people with autism and those who care for and support them. Indicate which best practices your site already implements (if applicable). Then determine whether there are additional best practices the site will choose to implement.

STEP 1: Arrival		How do participants arrive at the vaccination site?			
	Already implementing?		Will implement?		Implementation considerations
Fast-track/shorter lines to reduce wait time when arriving	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words for those with communication differences?
Alternate arrival lines for those with sensory related challenges, such as sensitivity to noisy traffic or bright sun	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words for those with communication differences?
Accessible parking	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words for those with communication differences?
Staff or volunteers to direct participants or answer questions	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can arrival staff provide participants with the "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" flyer?

**Step 2:
Check in/registration**

How and where do participants check in/register?

	<i>Already implementing?</i>		<i>Will implement?</i>		<i>Implementation considerations</i>
Expedited experience or other alternative for those with sensory or behavioral differences during wait at check in	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Alternate, quiet registration area for those with communication differences, anxiety or sensory related challenges, such as sensitivity to lighting, loud or echoing spaces, and smells (such as people using hand sanitizer)	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Dedicated staff or volunteers to guide a participant who discloses autism or another condition to the accommodations available to them	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can staff provide participants with the "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" flyer?
Signage that illustrates the registration process, including temperature monitoring, paperwork and required documentation	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Signage that indicates the estimated time it will take to complete the vaccination process, including before and after the shot	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Can participants wear hats or headphones to block sensory stimuli?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide all relevant staff with the "Four Things You Can Do" flyer?
Are there arrangements available for participants who have sensory issues regarding masks?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Is it clearly communicated that a family member or other support person can escort the patient through the vaccine visit?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, address the person with autism or related conditions and not the escort.
Can a person walk, pace or stim to regulate their anxiety or sensory needs?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide all relevant staff with the "Four Things You Can Do" flyer?
Are fidgets or stim toys that the person brings in with them allowed in the area?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide all relevant staff with the "Four Things You Can Do" flyer?
Once registered, does the participant understand how they will be called to the next step?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
If public address systems are used to call a participant, are there alternative communication sources for those with sensory processing issues?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Is someone designated at check-in to inform participants that they will have a 15- to 30-minute wait time following their vaccine?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Do participants understand they will be asked to wait on site for 15- to 30-minutes following the vaccination?	Yes	No	Yes	No	

**Step 3:
Getting the Vaccination**

How do participants receive the vaccination?

	<i>Already implementing?</i>		<i>Will implement?</i>		<i>Implementation considerations</i>
Expedited experience or other alternative for those with sensory or behavioral differences during wait at check in	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Alternate, quiet vaccination area for those with communication differences, anxiety or sensory-related challenges, such as sensitivity to lighting, loud or echoing spaces, and smells (such as people using hand sanitizer)	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Dedicated staff or volunteers to guide a participant who discloses autism or another condition to the accommodations available to them	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can staff provide participants with the "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" flyer?
Signage that illustrates the vaccination process	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Can participants wear hats or headphones to block sensory stimuli?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide all relevant staff with the "Four Things You Can Do" flyer?
Are there arrangements available for participants who have sensory issues regarding masks?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Is it clearly communicated that a family member or other support person may escort the patient through the vaccine visit?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Address the person with autism or related conditions and not the escort.
Can a person walk, pace or stim to regulate their anxiety or sensory needs?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide all relevant staff with the "Four Things You Can Do" flyer?
Are fidgets or stim toys that the person brings in with them allowed in the area?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can staff provide participants with the "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" flyer?
Does the participant understand how they will be called to the vaccination when it is their turn?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
If public address systems are used to call a participant, are there alternative communication sources for those with sensory processing issues?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Once the vaccination completed, do participants understand they will be asked to wait on site for 15-30 minutes following the vaccination?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can staff provide participants with the "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" flyer?
Will someone inform participants when they can leave the site following their 15-30-minute wait time?	Yes	No	Yes	No	

Step 4: Check-out/Exit

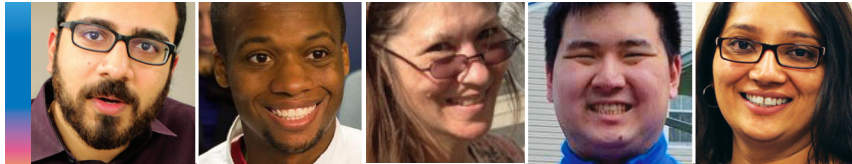
How do participants check out and exit the vaccination site?

	<i>Already implementing?</i>		<i>Will implement?</i>		<i>Implementation considerations</i>
Alternate, quiet waiting area for those with communication differences, anxiety or sensory-related challenges, such as sensitivity to lighting, loud or echoing spaces, and smells (such as people using hand sanitizer)	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?
Dedicated staff or volunteers to guide a participant who discloses autism or another condition to the accommodations available to them	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Can participants wear hats or headphones to block sensory stimuli?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide all relevant staff with the "Four Things You Can Do" flyer?
Are there arrangements available for participants who have sensory issues regarding masks?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Is it clearly communicated that a family member or other support person can escort the patient through the vaccine visit?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, address the person with autism or related conditions and not the escort.
Can a person walk, pace or stim to regulate their anxiety or sensory needs?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide all relevant staff with the "Four Things You Can Do" flyer?
Are fidgets or stim toys that the person brings in with them allowed in the area?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can staff provide participants with the "Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine" flyer?
If a participant must complete steps to schedule a second vaccination before exiting, is there a fast-track/shorter line to reduce wait time?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Will someone inform participants when they can leave the site following their 15- to 30-minute wait time?	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Is there signage clearly marking how a participant exits the vaccination site?	Yes	No	Yes	No	If implemented, can you provide signage using both icons and words?



4 Things You Can Do for People with Autism and Related Conditions

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a condition that causes social, communication, behavioral and sensory differences. Because of this, autistics may find COVID-19 vaccination settings challenging. Some people with related conditions, such as intellectual and neurological disabilities, also may experience challenges.



You can help create a safe, accessible and inclusive vaccine experience by doing just four things:

1. Don't expect autism or related conditions to look a particular way.



If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism. This is also true for people with related intellectual or neurological disabilities. You might meet people who need support from a family member or friend to have a successful visit, while others may do this independently.

What You Can Do

Be understanding and supportive. If someone discloses they have a condition, direct them to the accommodations that are available rather than questioning them. Keep in mind that some people might not disclose at all.

2. Adjust your communication expectations and style.



Autistic people and those with related conditions communicate in a variety of ways. Some use speech, while others have limited or no speech at all. You may encounter someone who types, uses picture systems or a device to communicate. Some people you meet may not use or respond to your gestures or facial expressions, and some may not make eye contact with you even though they are listening and understand you.

What You Can Do

Assume that the person you are talking to understands and speak to them. For some individuals, you may not be able to rely on speaking to communicate. Offer to write things down, provide a map or brochure, or point to signs or other visual cues at the site.

Some people may need time to respond to your questions or instructions, so don't rush. This is true for those who speak, as well as for those who use other forms of communication.



Autism Speaks is proud to work with AshBritt to provide guidance and best practices on creating an autism-friendly experience at COVID-19 vaccine locations.

3. Adjust the surroundings when possible.



Some vaccine participants may be highly sensitive to sensory input, such as lights, sounds, smells or physical contact with staff. Others may seek out sensory input to help them feel calm or organized, especially in new settings.

What You Can Do

Help participants know where and when they can expect high and low levels of activity, sounds, smells, voices, lights and more.

When possible, allow participants to use their own methods of feeling calm, such as allowing them to be accompanied by a family member or friend, or use fidgets or other tools, such as earplugs or protective eyewear.

4. Try to make things predictable and easy.



Many people with autism and related conditions function best when their environments are predictable and routine. Crowds and long lines can lead to uncertainty and discomfort. Unusual behaviors, like rocking, hand flapping or needing to pace, often are a sign that someone is anxious about or is working hard to be in that place.

What You Can Do

If available, guide the participant to a fast-track or shorter line to reduce anxiety during waiting time.

Share the ***“Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine”*** flyer with vaccine participants and those who support them.



Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine

A Guide for People with Autism and Related Conditions, and Their Support People

Try these tips to have a more comfortable COVID-19 vaccine experience. You can take these steps on your own, or have a family member or other trusted person help you.

BEFORE YOU GO:

Inform Yourself



Learn about the COVID-19 vaccine and why you are getting one. A medical professional, family member or other trusted person can help you with questions or concerns. Visual supports can be helpful to some autistics in learning new information. For the most essential information for people with disabilities, including information supports, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

Focus on Things You Like



If you're anxious, try to redirect your thoughts away from unpleasant, painful or unknown aspects of the upcoming visit. You can do this by doing an activity you like or something you find calming. You can also plan to do something you like after your vaccine so you have something pleasant to look forward to.

Think About What You'll Need



Plan ahead to have a tablet, toys, fidgets, headphones or visual supports to help you while waiting in lines or being in a new setting. You may want someone you trust to be with you during part or all of your vaccine experience. They can help you prepare, get to the vaccine location, communicate with site staff, do paperwork and be with you during the waiting period after your shot. They can also help you with choices to help you feel more organized and in control when you get to the appointment.

Consider ahead of time whether you wish to disclose that you are autistic or if you have another condition. Disclosing can help you get accommodations you may need. You might want to write or practice a script for asking for help or accommodations.

Bring Identification and Registration Information



You will be asked to validate your identity, and you might be asked to show medical insurance information. However, having insurance or proof of insurance is not required to get vaccinated. If you scheduled ahead of time, bring any information you have about your appointment, like a confirmation email. You also might need information about where to park, how to enter the site and other important details.

You will be asked to wear a mask at the vaccination site. If you need help practicing this skill, visit autismspeaks.org/coronavirus for a helpful video.

Contact the Vaccination Site



Consider calling or emailing the vaccination site before your visit to learn about or ask for available accommodations. These will vary depending on the site.

ON VACCINE DAY:

Check In



When you check in for your vaccination, you will be asked to wear a mask. The staff will take your temperature and may ask you to use hand sanitizer. The check-in staff will ask you to confirm your identity and may ask for insurance information. It's OK if you don't have insurance or proof of insurance. Also staff might ask for your appointment confirmation and have you fill out and sign paperwork.

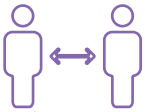
Check-in is a good time to ask about accommodations. You may wish to disclose that you are autistic or that you have another condition at check-in.

Wait for Your Turn



Expect to wait before you receive the vaccine. Depending on the location, you might be waiting in your car, a marked waiting area outside like a tent, a large building, or a room inside a building. This is a good time to do your planned activities or breathing exercises that help you feel calm when you have to wait.

Be Safe During Your Visit



Vaccine sites are all very different from each other. You should keep a safe distance from site staff and other people who are there to get their vaccine. Look for signs or other cues around you to help you, or ask the staff if you have any questions about what to do.

If a family member or trusted support person is with you, they may help you with choices so you feel more organized and in control during your visit.

Get Your Shot



Most COVID vaccines are given in your upper arm. The person who gives you the shot will give you more details. If a family member or support person is with you, they can help you through this part of your visit.

After Your Vaccination



For safety reasons, you will be asked to wait 15-30 minutes at the site after you get your shot and before you leave. This is another good time to use your planned activities, breathing exercises, a tablet, a toy or sensory item that helps you feel calm.

CONGRATULATIONS!



Getting the COVID-19 vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others from getting sick from the coronavirus. Before you leave, ask the site staff whether you need a second dose and how to schedule it if you do. They may also give you information about what to do for the next few days.

Register with the [CDC's v-safe](#) system to complete online check-ins about how you feel after your vaccine. Call your healthcare provider if you need healthcare advice.



Tell us what you think!

Please visit surveyMonkey.com/r/AS_HRC_COVID or scan this QR code to take a brief survey.

Do you need help getting your vaccine today?

Mark on this card the supports you need during your visit:



I need a support person to accompany me throughout my visit.



I need to wear headphones or use other sensory tools during my visit.



I need extra time to process the information I receive about my vaccine.



I need an accommodation while waiting, such as a quiet space, an expedited experience or another choice if available.



I need another accommodation (please fill in):



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Tell us about your visit!



Please visit surveymonkey.com/r/AS_HRC_COVID
or scan this QR code to take a brief survey.



We're here to help.

1-888-AUTISM2 | En Español (888) 772-9050 | help@autismspeaks.org

To find resources, join a fundraising walk or make a donation, go to autismspeaks.org.

Connect with us [@autismspeaks](https://twitter.com/autismspeaks).