

Vaccinating Children with Disabilities Against COVID-19

Information for Vaccine Providers and Partners Planning Vaccination

CDC recommends everyone 5 years and older get vaccinated against COVID-19 — including [children with disabilities](#) who may be at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

This page includes strategies to improve COVID-19 vaccine accessibility for children with disabilities and special healthcare needs.

A Greater Risk for COVID-19

Many children with disabilities have [underlying medical conditions](#)— such as lung, heart, or kidney disease, a weakened immune system, cancer, diabetes, some blood diseases, or conditions of the muscular or central nervous system — which put them at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Similarly, children with developmental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, an intellectual disability, or autism, may be at increased risk of mental health concerns from social isolation and severe illness from COVID-19. They may also have barriers to accessing needed health care and other characteristics that increase their risk of becoming infected with the virus that causes COVID-19, including

- Limited mobility
- Need for support services
- Challenges practicing preventive measures, such as wearing a mask
- Challenges communicating symptoms of infection

A special healthcare need can include physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, as well as long-standing medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, a blood disorder, or muscular dystrophy. Children and youth with special healthcare needs require more care for their physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional differences than their typically developing peers.

Learn more about [Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs in Emergencies](#).

Accessibility Strategies for Children with Disabilities at COVID-19 Vaccination Sites

Consider implementing and supporting the following strategies and [vaccination accommodations](#) to ensure children with disabilities and special healthcare needs – and their caregivers, family members, and service providers – under your care can receive their COVID-19 vaccinations at the clinic location:

Physical ease of access

- Schedule longer appointment times to ensure children feel comfortable before, during, and after vaccination.
- If possible, allow children to get vaccinated in their parent's or caregiver's vehicle.
- Consider having someone at the entrance of the vaccination site dedicated to assisting those who may need help with a wheelchair, walker, or other

[10 Tips from Special Olympics Athletes on How to Make COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics Inclusive](#)

Special Olympics partnered with Jefferson Center for Autism and Neurodiversity to raise COVID-19 vaccine awareness

aid and those requesting other accommodations.

- Allow children and their families to walk around while being observed after vaccination.

Sensory ease of access

- Make sensory modifications where needed, as some children may be sensitive to light, sounds, smells, or physical touch that vaccination requires.



Children are allowed by law to have their service animal accompany them at COVID-19 vaccination sites.

- Limit the time children must wait, and be patient, considering each child's individual needs.
- If possible, offer a separate, more private space or "quiet room" away from crowds or others.
- See [Needle Fears and Phobia – Find Ways to Manage](#) for more information and resources.

Cognitive ease of access

- Have vaccination providers explain all steps of what will be done and how it will be done.
- Ensure this information is available in different formats and languages. A visual storyboard, for example, can help young children understand vaccination.
- Share and use [resources such as picture stories](#) to support children during and after vaccination.
- Share additional information with parents and caregivers on [COVID-19 Vaccination for Children and Teens with Disabilities](#).

To ensure all children with disabilities in your community have access to the COVID-19 vaccine, you can collaborate with

- Pediatric medical providers and healthcare organizations
- State or local health departments
- Local school districts
- Disability-specific practices and clinics
- Pediatric occupational, physical, and speech therapists
- Children's hospitals
- Community-based organizations serving children with disabilities

Remember, children with disabilities and special healthcare needs benefit most from [team-based care](#) . Trusted care providers can work with parents and caregivers to learn and address any specific vaccination concerns.

COVID-19 Vaccine Disability Information and Access Line (DIAL)

Share DIAL with parents and families of children with disabilities. Let them know they can call 1-888-677-1199 Monday–Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. or email DIAL@usaginganddisability.org for help with

- Finding local vaccination locations
- Making appointments
- Connecting to local services such as accessible transportation

Vaccine Safety Monitoring

To help monitor vaccine safety

- Report serious health events occurring after vaccination to the [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System \(VAERS\)](#). CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration review VAERS data to identify potential safety concerns. Learn more: [Ensuring COVID-19 Vaccine Safety in the United States](#).
- Encourage families to enroll children in [v-safe](#). v-safe provides personalized and confidential health check-ins to share how their child feels after their COVID-19 vaccination.

Report multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C)

- Report possible cases of MIS-C to your local, state, or territorial health department. Questions? Contact CDC’s 24-hour Emergency Operations Center at 1-770-488-7100. Download and print the [Reporting MIS-C fact sheet](#)  to learn more.
- The American College of Rheumatology has developed [clinical guidance for pediatric patients diagnosed with MIS-C associated with COVID-19](#) .

Additional Resources

[Ensuring Equitable COVID-19 Vaccination for People with Disabilities and Their Caregivers](#)

This CDC commentary outlines the most common challenges to equitable COVID-19 vaccination.

[Talking to Patients with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities about COVID-19 Vaccination](#)

Resources and information that may be helpful when talking with older children and adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their parents or caregivers.

[Slide Deck: COVID-19 Vaccines and Children with Developmental Disabilities: Let’s Talk](#)

Webinar held Nov. 17, 2021, from VaxFactsDDNY, a project of Rose F. Kennedy Children’s Evaluation & Rehabilitation Center at Albert Einstein College of Medicine

[Important Considerations for COVID-19 Vaccination of Children with Developmental Disabilities \(*Pediatrics*, Oct 2021\)](#)

[COVID-19 Vaccination Clinical and Professional Resources | CDC](#)