

Get Vaccinated!

Info on COVID-19 Vaccinations for People with Disabilities

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COVID-19 and People with Disabilities

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COVID-19

- COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, a coronavirus discovered in 2019.
 - The virus spreads mainly through respiratory droplets
- Some people who are infected may not have symptoms.
- For people who have symptoms, illness can range from mild to severe

The best way to prevent severe COVID-19 is through vaccination.

2021 National Council on Disability (NCD) Progress Report: The Impact of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities

"The Coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately impacted people with disabilities, not because the virus targets disability, but because long-standing shortcomings in numerous systems predictably left us vulnerable. The report explains how the pandemic has unmasked profound inequities in nearly every aspect of life; the imperative to be consciously inclusive of disability; and the need for urgent reforms."

NCD Chairman Andrés Gallegos.

COVID-19 and People with Disabilities

Some people with disabilities might be more likely to get infected because:

- They live in congregate living settings
- They rely on others for personal care
- They have difficulty getting vaccinated
- They have underlying medical conditions

COVID-19 and People with Disabilities

Those who are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19 include those people with chronic conditions like:

- chronic lung disease
- heart conditions
- diabetes
- obesity
- weakened immune system

Adults with disabilities are three times more likely than adults without disabilities to have heart disease, diabetes, cancer, or a stroke.

Get Vaccinated!

Common reasons to hesitate

- Not trusting the safety and/or effectiveness of the vaccine and the impact on your disability
- Fear of worsening or aggravating a person's current disability or underlying medical conditions
- Fear of side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine
- Concerns about any long-term side effects of the vaccine
- Previous trauma and reactions to vaccines
- Lack of trust in medical professionals from experience
- Not trusting the information about vaccines because it doesn't include information about people with disabilities and/or it's not accessible

Side Effects are Normal

- Vaccine side effects are normal for people with and without disabilities. Not everyone will experience a side effect.
- Common temporary side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine:
 - Pain, redness, or swelling where you received the shot
 - Fever and chills
 - Headache
 - Nausea
 - Tiredness
- Side effects mean your body is learning to protect itself against COVID-19.
- Side effects should go away after a few days.
- Still worried? Talk to your doctor.

MYTH: Vaccines give people COVID-19

- No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines approved in the United States contain the live virus.
- The vaccines approved in the United States are the Pfizer vaccine, the Moderna vaccine, and the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine.
- These shots do not use the live virus. They can't make you sick with COVID-19.

MYTH: Vaccines don't work – people are still getting sick

- COVID-19 vaccines have been shown to prevent severe symptoms and hospitalizations.
 - Most of the people in the hospital with COVID-19 have not been fully vaccinated.
 - You can still catch the virus from someone after you get the shot. This is called a breakthrough infection.
 - You will most likely have mild symptoms. The vaccine helps you not get as sick as you could if you were not vaccinated.

MYTH: I don't need the vaccine – I already had COVID

- It is possible to become sick with COVID-19 more than once. Scientists have learned that getting the shot may protect you from COVID-19 better than natural immunity.
- After getting sick with COVID-19, you may have “natural immunity”.
- Natural immunity may offer some natural protection, but experts do not know how long it lasts and if it protects against variants.
- Consider getting your COVID-19 vaccine to protect yourself and your community.

MYTH: I don't trust the vaccine – it was developed too fast

- The three COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. (Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson) were developed in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- Research that led to these types of vaccines has been going on for over 50 years.
- The COVID-19 vaccine went through the same safety steps as other vaccines
- The COVID-19 vaccines were produced quickly to save lives.
- COVID-19 vaccines were made thanks to funding and scientists around the world working together.
- The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and are proven to work for people with disabilities.

MYTH: People of color should not be vaccinated

- COVID-19 data shows that Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian and Alaska Native persons in the US experience higher rates of COVID-19-related hospitalization and death compared with non-Hispanic White populations.
- Many independent groups, including those led by doctors of color, such as the National Medical Association, a professional society of African American doctors, have reviewed the data. They believe the vaccines work and are safe.
- 96% of doctors are fully vaccinated according to the American Medical Association.

MYTH: Politicians don't think the vaccine works

- Many government officials, including all living U.S. presidents and current governors, got COVID-19 vaccines.
- Politicians on both sides of the aisle have been vaccinated.
- 46 out of 50 Republican Senators had been vaccinated as of July 2021.

Protect yourself

- In addition to getting vaccinated and practicing everyday preventive actions, people with disabilities who have direct support providers can help protect themselves from respiratory illness in the following ways:
 - Ask your Aide if they are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.
 - **Have your Aide:**
 - Wash their hands when they enter your home and before and after touching you.
 - Clean high-touch surfaces and objects.

Making The Decision to Get Vaccinated

The Lived experience: Marcus Johnson

Mental Health and Wellness

Info on COVID-19 Mental Health for
People with Disabilities

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Reality...

"To so many people, [disability] remains a mystery, this very scary and overwhelming topic," says disability rights activist and writer **Emily Ladau**. "We don't talk about it. We ignore it. We shy away from it. We hide it away. But that's not what we should do when it comes to disability, because it's just something that's part of what makes people who they are."

COVID-19 and Mental Health for People with Disabilities

In the United States, 1 in 4 adults—61 million—have a disability. Many people will experience a disability at some point during their lives. [More than 1 billion people](#) — nearly 15% of the world's population — experience some form of disability. Emerging research on COVID-19 shows that the coronavirus pandemic has increased psychological distress both in the general population and among high-risk groups.

- Research on past pandemics shows that disabled people find it harder to access critical medical supplies which can become even more challenging as resources become scarce.
- People with disabilities report higher levels of social isolation than their nondisabled counterparts. They may experience intensified feelings of loneliness in response to physical distancing measures

COVID-19 and Mental Health for People with Disabilities

- Social isolation and loneliness have been associated with increases in heart disease, dementia and other health problems according to the [National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine](#).
- Policies around rationing of medical care can intensify discriminatory attitudes towards disabled individuals during times of crisis. This can understandably worsen **anxiety** about getting sick and needing to seek medical care.
- **Adults with disabilities report experiencing frequent mental distress almost 5 times as often as adults without disabilities.**

Uniquely people with disabilities are at higher risk

- Underlying or secondary aspects of their disability, like suppressed immune systems or respiratory concerns, can worsen COVID-19 risk.
- Underlying acute health conditions, such as skin breakdown or urinary tract infection, which increase risk of severe symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- Being classified as “high risk” in the current pandemic can cause additional **stress** and **fears**.

Protect yourself

- Contact your physician if your mental health gets in the way of your daily activities for at least 14 days in a month.
- Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to stressful situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can depend on your background, your support systems (e.g. family or friends), your financial situation, your health and emotional background, the community you live in, and many other factors.
- People with disabilities or developmental delays may respond strongly to the stress of a crisis, particularly if they are also at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 (for example, older people and people of any age with certain underlying medical conditions).

Get Treatment!

Common reasons to hesitate

- The majority of individuals who have a mental illness do not seek or receive treatment.
- While there are multiple reasons why, one is the fact that people avoid or forego mental health treatment, due to judgment, doubt, pride, fear and misinformation.
- Individuals fear judgment, change, the unknown, and what they might discover in therapy; additionally, they're too prideful to admit they need help.
- Some people doubt the efficacy of mental health treatment: they're uncertain it will work and don't believe it's worth a try.
- Finally, others are completely misinformed about therapy—they don't understand the process and are unsure how their therapist or counselor will view them.

MYTH: Mental health treatment and misinformation

People forego mental health treatment because they're misinformed about what it involves and how they'll be perceived by their therapist. More often than not, people are misinformed about what therapy actually is and have developed the belief that if they attend therapy, it means they're crazy, not true. This perspective is a result of how the media portrays mental health professionals.

Early warning signs

Not sure if you or someone you know is living with mental health problems? Experiencing one or more of the following feelings or behaviors can be an early warning sign of a problem:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling helpless or hopeless

Early warning signs (cont'd)

- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

SHIFT: Mental Illness to Mental Health and Wellness

What is Mental Wellness?

Mental wellness is a key component to establishing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, “...a state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes their own abilities, can **cope** with the **normal** stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

Uniquely, disability has internal and external factors that influence mental wellness, including relationships with loved ones, financial issues, work environment and coping skills.

SHIFT: Mental Health and Wellness

Positive mental health allows people to:

- Realize their full potential
- Cope with the stresses of life
- Work productively
- Make meaningful contributions to their communities

SHIFT: Mental Health and Wellness (cont'd)

Ways to maintain positive mental health include:

- Getting professional help if you need it
- Connecting with others
- Staying positive
- Getting physically active
- Helping others
- Getting enough sleep
- Developing coping skills

Most importantly

- Know what to do if you are sick and are concerned about **COVID-19**. Contact a health provider before you start any self-treatment for COVID-19.
- Know where and how to get mental health treatment and other support services and resources, including counseling or therapy (in-person or through telehealth services).

Stay Ready So You Don't Have To Get Ready

Resources

- If you are in crisis, get immediate help:

<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/get-help/immediate-help>

- NYC Well

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/nyc-well.page>

- FindTreatment.org

<https://findtreatment.gov/>

- CDC: Mental Health

<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>

- Disability Access

<https://portal.311.nyc.gov/article/?kanumber=KA-02321>

Thank You!

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