

Supporting people with a learning disability and autistic people to get the COVID-19 vaccination

Top tips for primary care teams

In keeping with the Equality Act 2010, we need to provide reasonable adjustments to disabled people. Providing appropriate reasonable adjustments can make the difference between a person with a learning disability, autism or both having the vaccine or not.

This means taking away any barriers or providing extra support, so it's easier for an individual to feel safe and comfortable when receiving their vaccine.

A good experience at a person's first appointment will help ensure they feel comfortable and confident when returning for their second appointment. Be mindful that the environment and the personal protective equipment you are wearing may cause the person stress and anxiety.

This guide contains top tips to best support a person who is autistic, who has a learning disability or both. These considerations may also be useful when supporting other disabled people.

Remember!

Every person has their own needs and concerns. Be patient. Help the person feel in control. Make sure you are thinking about what each person needs before, during and after the appointment to ensure that vaccinations will be more efficient and successful.

Before and during the appointment

- Make sure people are told about their appointment as early as possible, in an accessible way they can understand.
- Ask the person if they want you to send them a text or email with their appointment date, time and place and if possible, a link to what the location looks like.
- Confirm with them/their carer that they can take someone with them to the appointment if they want to.
- Ask the person and their carer about any concerns they may have, including what they might find stressful and what reasonable adjustments could help with this. **See page 2 for some examples.**
- Where the use of face masks may cause distress or inhibit communication and understanding, consider alternative options and carry out a risk assessment.

You can use the easy-read vaccination guide to help explain to the person what the vaccination involves:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-easy-read-resources>.



After the appointment

If it is the person's first vaccination, make sure they are aware they will need to have another one. Make sure they understand why. Check their understanding.

Make sure the person has a copy of their vaccination record card, that it is filled in, and that they know to keep it safe.

It might help to give the person the 'What to expect after vaccination' leaflet, also available in easy read if they need it:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963183/Easy_Read_what_to_expect_after_your_vaccination_leaflet.pdf.

Some examples of reasonable adjustments

This list is not exhaustive:

- Check the person's summary care record for any specific needs
- Where possible, hold the appointment in a local and familiar place
- Offer to give the vaccine at home or in their car/cab, if possible
- Provide a quiet or less brightly lit space
- Schedule appointment times at the quietest times of the day
- Provide double appointment times so you are not rushed
- Check if the person is scared of needles. Find out what may help them
- The option of waiting in a quiet room, if one is available
- The option of waiting in their car outside and being texted or called on their mobile when ready
- Using plain English and no medical jargon
- Having easy read and accessible resources, materials and information to hand
- Check they have fully understood what you have told them by asking them and their carer
- Send a reminder before the appointment by calling or texting
- Talk to the person in a kind and friendly way throughout their appointment to ease anxiety
- Check what might help to distract the person or to help keep them calm



If someone isn't sure what would help them, but appears to be distressed, it is okay to make some suggestions and let them decide what might be helpful – but don't overwhelm them with too many options. Keep it simple.

Further resources

NHS reasonable adjustment guide for staff supporting people with a learning disability, autism or both

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/learning-disabilities/improving-health/reasonable-adjustments/>

[NHS England and NHS improvement advice on using the right words](#)

[Autism fact sheets](#) (short resource developed for NHS volunteer responders)

[Learning disability fact sheets](#) (short resource developed for NHS volunteer responders)

PHE vaccination leaflet easy-read <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-easy-read-resources>.

[Guidance on Mental Capacity Act](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-looking-after-people-who-lack-mental-capacity/the-mental-capacity-act-2005-mca-and-deprivation-of-liberty-safeguards-dols-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-additional-guidancea#best-interest-decisions>

MENCAP Treat me Well Campaign (<https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/treat-me-well>).

MENCAP Equality Act easy read PDF

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-02/Equality%20Act%20-%20Easy%20Read.pdf>.

NICE clinical guide for frontline staff to support the management of patients with a learning disability, autism or both during the coronavirus pandemic

<https://www.nice.org.uk/Media/Default/About/COVID-19/Specialty-guides/learning-disability-autism-during-pandemic.pdf>.

