



# VACCINATION DAY FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

## *Tips for Medical Staff*

The vaccination experience may be fear-invoking for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who experience sensory overstimulation, social anxiety and processing delays, especially as they experience new information. For some individuals, “new information” may be new environments, faces, tones of voice, scents, and others’ movement patterns. For others, they may have a history of intense fear of shots, which can produce a high level of anxiety at the vaccine appointment. To support these differences, please consider the following tips:

- Ask the person or their supporter, which could be a family member or staff person, if they have any preferences for how you should approach their care during the vaccination. Some may have visual schedules which you can participate in.
  - Ask the person, family member, and/or their support person if directions are best to be given verbally or with gestures, pointing and signaling.
  - If communicating verbally, maintain a regulated tone of voice and rhythm.
  - If possible, offer a quieter room or space for their vaccination.
  - The supporter or family member may offer a strategy that includes hiding the syringe from the person’s view.
  - The supporter or family member may have strategies for preparing the person before the vaccine is administered, including distracting the person’s view when the syringe is inserted.
- Speak directly and age appropriately to the person, instead of directing information to other people such as family or a support person.
  - You may find that someone else is speaking on the person’s behalf. Please continue speaking directly to the person, while acknowledging the support person.
- You may notice the person using strategies for self-regulation (to maintain calm or reduce anxiety). Some strategies you may see:
  - The support person or family may use a visual schedule to coach the person through the experience. They may mark off each step as you go.
  - The person may repeat phrases to themselves (scripting). Some people may want you to repeat these phrases, while others may not. Consider asking the person or their family members about their preferences.

- The person may watch a video as a means of maintaining a focal point to reduce anxiety.
- The person may hold an object, rock their body, or have a verbal phrase that helps to keep them calm.
- When appropriate, give notice about what you plan to do, before beginning and as you go.
- Avoid asking the person to stay very still if they are moving around, as they may not have control over their body motions or may be moving to self-regulate their anxiety. If needed, ask for help from the support person or family member to help the person hold still for the shot. Note that some people may feel more comfortable on the ground or in the hallway instead of sitting on a designated chair.
- Utilize slow movement when approaching, when initiating physical contact, and when moving from one point of contact on their body to another.
  - Approach the person from the front. Avoid approaching from behind or appearing too suddenly.
- After the vaccine is administered, some people with disabilities appreciate praise and many will feel proud.