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# **A Self-Advocate's Guide to COVID-19**

## **Part 9: Know Your Rights: Bringing a Supporter to a Hospital or a Doctor's Office**

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On June 9, 2020, the Office of Civil Rights made it clear that all people with disabilities are allowed to bring a supporter with them when in a hospital or a doctor's office. This booklet describes how you can speak up for your rights. To see a video made by self-advocates using the information in this booklet go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9y1rOWyf\\_XM&t=63s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9y1rOWyf_XM&t=63s)

# Know Your Rights: Bringing a Supporter to a Hospital or a Doctor's Office

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## For People with Disabilities

COVID-19 or the Coronavirus has caused big changes in how hospitals and doctor's offices work. They are not letting people visit patients.

Here is why:

1. Hospitals are worried that visitors could catch COVID-19.
2. And visitors who have COVID-19 can give it to other people.

Some visitors who have COVID-19 might not even know they are sick.

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**These new rules about no visitors can be a problem. Many people with disabilities are not be able to go to a hospital or doctor's office alone. People with disabilities may need help to communicate and understand what is happening.**

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## There is the good news.



On June 9, 2020, the Office of Civil Rights made it clear that all hospitals must allow people with disabilities to bring a supporter to the hospital or a doctor's office. Here is how to advocate for a supporter to be with you.

### Tip #1

- Tell the hospital you have a disability. Tell them you need a supporter with you.
- It will help to say your supporter is a “reasonable accommodation” under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### Tip #2

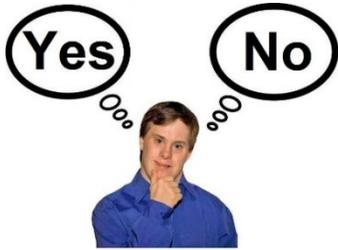
Explain why you need a supporter to get good healthcare. If you have trouble speaking, do this with your supporter.



- **To help you communicate.**  
You may need someone who understands the way you express yourself. You may need help using a communication device.



- **To help you with personal care.**  
You may need someone who knows how to assist you to eat, shower or go to the bathroom.



- **To help you make decisions.**  
When making a decision, you may need help understanding what choices you have.



- **To help you talk to doctors and nurses.**  
Doctors talk about things that are hard to understand but are important for your health. You may need someone who knows you to help you understand what a doctor is saying.



- **To help you feel safe.**  
Some people cannot feel safe unless the right person is with them. Some people, when they do not feel safe, panic. They may try to run away. That is not safe. This is why some people might need the right person to be with them.

## Laws that Protect Your Rights

People with disabilities have rights.

These Laws protect our rights.

- The **ADA or Americans with Disabilities Act** says you cannot discriminate against people with disabilities in all areas of public life.
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** says any program that gets federal money must give people with disabilities equal opportunity and equal access.

Both laws require hospitals and doctor's offices to make **reasonable accommodations** or change rules for people with disabilities. For example, many hospitals do not let dogs in the hospital. But they have to let service dogs in the hospital.

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On June 9, 2020, the Office of Civil Rights made is clear that all hospitals must allow any disabled patients to have a supporter with them. You can read the requirements at:

<http://www.gmsavt.org/ocf-june-6-2020/>

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## Here are more details for you and your supporters.



1. Hospitals must provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for your supporter to keep them safe. PPE means a mask, gloves, goggles or a gown.

2. You can more than one supporter. Your supporters must take turns being with you. You may only be allowed to have one supporter with you at a time.



3. Your supporter can leave the hospital to take a break and come back later.

4. People with all different types of disabilities are allowed to have a supporter with them in the hospital or doctor's offices.



5. Your supporter is allowed to eat, drink, and use the bathroom while they are in the hospital.



6. The medical staff must write down how to best communicate with you.

Communication with people with disabilities needs to be as effective as communication with people without disabilities.

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**People with disabilities in ALL states are allowed to have a supporter with them when in a hospital or a doctor's office.**

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**If you need more information:**



- Ask the hospital to give you a copy of their policy. It will list a contact person. Call if you have questions.
- Protection and Advocacy may be able to help you. You can find one near you at:

<https://www.ndrn.org/about/ndrn-member-agencies/>