

Preparation for Protests: DOH Care-a-Van Guidance for Mobile COVID-19 Vaccinations

People opposed to vaccination have gathered outside vaccination clinics to protest and share their views, including in Washington. This guide will help explain their intent and help you understand how to respond appropriately, should a protest happen at a Care-a-Van event. Please use the checklists beginning on page 2 to help event staff and partners prepare.

Protester Background: Intent and Messaging

There are three key messages commonly shared by vaccination site protesters:

1. “COVID-19 disease is not dangerous”
2. “COVID-19 vaccines (and/or other vaccines) are dangerous”
3. “Vaccine advocates (such as government entities) are not to be trusted”

Vaccine protesters often hold negative attitudes about vaccination and may hold deeply personal beliefs. Narratives vary but will typically include denial of scientific/medical evidence and false information that supports the appearance of legitimate concerns. This is a persuasive attempt to cause fear or hesitation toward vaccination and may include political or religious themes to attract further attention.

Protester activity may be more likely to occur at or near events where the following applies:

- Vaccination will be offered to persons under 18 years of age
 - ex: Schools, child care centers, parks
- Workplace or employer-based locations
 - ex: Shared parking lots, shopping areas

Common protester tactics include:

- Holding signs with misleading statements, fear slogans, and themes of personal freedom.
- Distributing flyers to spread misinformation on vaccine safety.
- Chanting or yelling, with soundbites of government mistrust.
- Blocking entrances or exits to interrupt services.
- Taking videos or pictures, or livestreaming.

Protesters may have the legal right to protest on public grounds near your site location. Most protests are held on public sidewalks, streets, or parks near access points to events. Check your local ordinances to identify potential public spaces where protesters may gather at your location. Generally, protesters may not gather on private property without permission of the property owner.

Ask the on-site contact to consult the facility owner to find out what they'd like your approach to be if a protest gathers at a Care-a-Van event on private property.

Protesters **CAN**:

- Protest through protected speech, hand out flyers, and gather signatures on public sidewalks when these activities don't hinder traffic, create a risk to public safety, or compete with others' uses beyond the ordinary use of the space.
- March in the street if a proper permit is granted.
- Verbally criticize event activity and staff, including comments directed toward police or military personnel.
- Record video, livestream, and take photos.

Protesters **CANNOT**:

- Communicate intent to inflict imminent bodily harm against another person.
- Encourage immediate acts of violence intended to cause a riot, violence, or serious harm.
- Block vehicle or pedestrian traffic without proper permit issued. This includes blocking the Care-a-Van vehicle.
- Trespass on private property or engage in civil disobedience without recourse.

Before an Incident: Preparation and Action Steps

Site leadership and security:

- Discuss security staffing options with the venue owner or employer. They may provide security staff, or the event planning team might need to consider hiring outside security. Confirm whether they want to be contacted if protesters do show up.
- If the event is held on private property, ahead of time, ask the employer to properly communicate to staff when and where the event will take place to minimize impacts to normal business operations.
- Designate a staff person(s) to make decisions, report incidents, and call law enforcement if warranted.
- Hold briefings with staff before and after arriving on location to discuss protest activity and/or concerns.
- Identify and create a plan to use alternative entrances and exits for visitors/patients in case protest activity impacts event operations.
- Create a plan for emergency/temporary shutdown procedures if law enforcement presence is requested.

Event staff:

- Posters are available for your event, and can be found online for printing [in our provider toolkit](#) under "Print Materials."
- Have an identification badge, or other item, identifying staff members and volunteers at all times.

- Become familiar with the alternate entrance and exit plan for the event site. Physically identify the locations to make sure the team can direct people there if needed.
- Become familiar with public spaces allowed for protest activity at your location. Know the boundaries between public and private property. If the event is scheduled for private property, know the designated area and boundaries for Care-a-Van operations.

If an Incident Occurs: Response Guidance

Attendees and staff may feel uncomfortable with protester presence. While protests are not always preventable, Care-a-Van staff do have control on appropriate response.

Whenever possible, follow best practices:

- ✓ Do not engage with protesters.
- ✓ Do not return any abusive language.
- ✓ Maintain social and physical distance from protest activity.
- ✓ Be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times.
- ✓ Notify site leader/security staff of concerns reported by attendees.

Non-engagement is the best course of action. However, if you must engage, try these examples of acceptable, limited interaction:

- “Please do not approach me further.”
- “Please keep six feet of distance.”
- “I’m going to walk away now.”
- “If you’d like to file a complaint about this event, please contact [*Fill in below*].”
 - For complaints about Care-a-Van staff: _____
 - For concerns about nursing staff, or a vaccine received: _____
 - For complaints about location: _____
- “Thank you, I do not wish to talk about this further.”
- “I’m sorry, this is a medical clinic and you cannot come past this point without documentation that you are here to receive a vaccine.”

If a protester engages you and you cannot get them to leave, do not continue to talk with them. Ignore them, walk away if possible, and call/alert your security contact if you feel threatened.

Site leadership and security:

- Notify property owner/employer if protester activity begins so they are aware.
- Do not engage with protesters (or counter-protestors). Keep your distance.
- Do not return any abusive language.
- Property owner/employer should contact law enforcement if human activity impacts event operations. Some examples of when law enforcement may be necessary:
 - Event entrances or exits are blocked.
 - Vehicle or pedestrian traffic is blocked, without a proper permit issued.
 - Protester activity extends beyond allowed public spaces.
 - Protesters engage in hostile or threatening language, even at a distance.
 - Property is damaged.

- A person encourages or incites immediate acts of violence intended to cause a riot, violence, or serious harm.
- Use prepared alternative entrances and exits if police presence interrupts operations.

If media arrive:

In the event of media interest of protest activity, all media requests and inquiries should be directed to the Washington State Department of Health’s public information desk at doh-pio@doh.wa.gov.

In some instances, DOH or local health jurisdiction media relations or public information officer staff may be present. In those cases, the designated media point person will handle requests.

If media arrive on site and the media point person or PIO isn’t currently available, use this authorized holding statement until your media coordinator arrives or you can get in touch with on-site public information staff:

“We respect the right of people to express their opinions. Our Care-a-Van program works with local community health partners to provide accessible opportunities for those who choose to get vaccinated. These vaccines have been shown to be safe and effective against COVID-19 and are saving lives. We continue to serve people in all areas of Washington as quickly as we can to stop this deadly disease through vaccination. Find out more about COVID-19 vaccine at www.CovidVaccineWA.org.”

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up to date on COVID-19 in Washington by visiting the following:

- COVID-19 Vaccine:
 - www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/Vaccine
- Testing Information:
 - www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/TestingforCOVID19
- Gov. Jay Inslee’s Proclamations:
 - www.governor.wa.gov/office-governor/official-actions/proclamations
- Frequently Asked Questions:
 - www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/FrequentlyAskedQuestions

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](http://WashingtonRelay.org)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.