

# Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment writes to States/UTs to ensure basic physical accessibility features for divyangjan in centres for COVID-19 testing & quarantine facilities and treatment at hospitals

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The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has asked all States and Union Territories to ensure basic physical accessibility features for Divyangjan (PwDs) as per reasonable accommodation in the centres for COVID-19 testing and quarantine facilities as well as for treatment at hospitals and health centres. In a letter to the Chief Secretaries of all States and UTs, Smt. Shakuntala D. Gamlin, Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has said that to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, many COVID-19 centers have been identified as containment units, isolation treatment centres and testing labs for enhancing the holding capacity for medical purposes as required. The current crisis poses even greater threats to the Divyangjan not just due to their lesser/compromised immunity, ability to perceive or comprehend information but also due to non-availability of accessibility features in the physical environment and eco-system provided at such COVID related facilities.

DEPwD has already published guidelines concerning information dissemination in alternative accessible formats, priority treatment for the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and provisions of safety, healthy living and hygiene for PwDs, attendants, care-givers and accessible service providers, such as sign language interpreters. In addition, it is also necessary that basic physical accessibility features are ensured, as per reasonable accommodation in the centres for COVID-19 testing and quarantine facilities as well as for treatment at hospitals and health centres.

States/UTs have been requested to urgently initiate necessary action to ensure these basic features of accessibility are provided so that PwDs, persons with restricted mobility and those dependent upon attendants/caregivers are not inconvenienced further, especially during the times of this pandemic. The basic features of accessibility are as follows:

1. All operating and control mechanisms and self-operated devices (sanitizer dispensers, glove cases, soaps, wash basins) are placed within approachable reach of PwDs, especially for wheelchair users.
2. Graphical and simple, prominent signage as per standard requirements of colour and contrast are put up.
3. Ramps (gradient 1:12) with railings are provided.
4. At least One (01) low height accessible counter at reception, testing areas and pharmacies.
5. Audio announcements and captioned videos for public announcements of important news to be made.
6. Ensure accessibility in lifts or assigning liftman in at least one lift for extending help to PwDs.
7. Reserving areas/ rooms/ wards for PwDs that may be provided with accessible toilets.
8. Provision for vestibular cabins for attendants of COVID-19 patients, especially with intellectual disability and mental illness.

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