

Preparation for Protests: DOH Mass Vaccination Clinic Guidance

In some states, including Washington, people opposed to vaccination have gathered outside of vaccination clinics to protest the clinic or to share their views on vaccination. This guide will help you understand their intent and how to respond appropriately, should this happen at your location. Please use the checklist on page 2 to help your clinic and staff prepare for potential protest activity.

Protester Background: Intent and Messaging

There are three key messages commonly shared by protesters who assemble at vaccination sites. These messages are typically intended to sow fear and mistrust:

1. “[_____] disease is not dangerous/not real”
2. “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.

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. Consult the owner of the facility hosting your event to find out what they’d like your approach to be if a gathering does happen on private property at your event.

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 has been 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.
- 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. They may provide security staff, or you might need to consider hiring outside security. Confirm whether the venue owner wants to be contacted if protesters do show up.
- Designate a staff person(s) to make decisions, report incidents, and call law enforcement if warranted.
- Notify local law enforcement about anticipated protest activity for their awareness.
- Hold daily briefings with staff before and after clinic hours to discuss protest activity and/or concerns.
- Ask that staff and volunteers wear something that clearly identifies them as such (this includes leadership, security, and event staff). This makes it easy to clearly identify who is authorized to be present, and it increases visitor comfort and confidence.
- Identify and create a plan to use alternative entrances and exits for visitors/patients in case protest activity impacts clinic operations.
- Create a plan for emergency/temporary shutdown procedures if law enforcement presence is requested.
- Ensure clinic leads have contact information for everyone they need to call if protesters begin to gather.
- Dedicate a point person/public information officer for media interest (see RESPONSE GUIDANCE below) and have them create a media plan.
- Designate a space for media to set up, should they arrive.

Event staff:

- Educate attendees with guidance to ease concerns on site. Build reminders into the electronic scheduling process, or ask event staff to communicate information at check-in. Basic messaging may include:
 - “Please leave windows rolled up until securely on site”
 - “Stay in your vehicle at all times, or until parked in designated areas”
 - “Please report any concerns you have to clinic staff”
- Request/hang perimeter signs to discourage protest gatherings at entry or exit locations (ex: Appointments only beyond this point, No Trespassing, No Parking).

- Have your identification badge or other item that identifies you as a staff or volunteer visible to visitors at all times.
- Become familiar with the alternate entrance and exit plan from site leadership. Physically identify the locations to make sure you will be able to 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 your clinic is walk-in, designate staff to escort attendees to their vehicles, if necessary.
- Designate staff to monitor parking lots and instruct them to report concerns observed to site leadership/security.

If an Incident Occurs: Response Guidance

Attendees and staff may be uncomfortable with protester presence. While protests are not preventable, clinics do have control on appropriate response.

Whenever possible, follow best practices:

- ✓ Do not engage with protesters.
- ✓ Maintain social and physical distance from protest activity.
- ✓ Be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times.

If you must engage, try these examples of acceptable 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 clinic, please contact [_____].”
- “Thank you, I do not wish to talk about this further.”
- “I’m sorry, this is a private event and you cannot come past this point without an appointment.”

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.

Site leadership and security:

- Do not engage with protesters (or counter-protestors). Keep your distance.
- Do not return any abusive language.
- Notify law enforcement if human activity impacts event operations. Some examples of when law enforcement may be necessary:
 - Clinic entrances or exits are blocked.
 - Vehicle or pedestrian traffic is blocked, without a proper permit issued.
 - Protester activity extends beyond allowed public spaces.
 - Protesters come on to private property.
 - Property is damaged.

