



# Accessible Communications

*Some top tips from DoNoHarm BC*

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This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide; it's only a very small starting place. We encourage you to join us in learning more about accessibility and [disability justice](#) from the many great resources available. Thank you for your interest in making progress on accessibility!

## Menu

[Covid wording](#) | [Access info](#) | [Alt text](#) | [Content warnings](#) | [Format](#) | [Inclusive language](#)

## Language around COVID

### We tend to prefer:

- Referring to the COVID-19 pandemic in the present tense
- Universal masking, mask directives, mask protections, mask requirements, etc. (instead of “mandates”)
- Referring to Covid “protections” or “precautions”, “health and safety measures”, “safety tools”, etc.
- “Remove”, “discard”, “withdraw”, “strip away” safety measures; “restore” these things (it implies they should have been there!)
- High-risk (instead of “at risk”, if we’re referring to a subsection of the population - because everyone’s at risk!)

## We tend to avoid:

- Referring to the pandemic in the past tense, as if it's already over or COVID isn't a problem anymore
- COVID "restrictions" (can make it sound like protective measures are negative)
- "Loosen" or "lift" mask mandates (can make it sound like a burden is being relieved)
- "Covid-cautious" (we recognize and celebrate the fact that many people and groups identify with this or similar terms. We simply use it less in public health advocacy materials for strategic reasons: some minimizers may associate "caution" with unwarranted anxiety, and we don't want to inadvertently imply that only a small subsection of the public should be using safety measures for COVID and other illnesses)
- Ableist language (see 'Accessibility: Inclusive language' below)
- At-risk (if we mean high-risk)

**Note:** there is the potential for some screen reader software to get confused by all-caps words, and read out each letter separately. This could theoretically raise issues for terms like "COVID-19" or "SARS-CoV-2". With this in mind, some people may prefer to style Covid with only the first letter capitalized, even though all-caps is more "correct". Your mileage may vary.

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## Accessibility

### Access info

- Provide basic accessibility info (including Covid safety info, if in-person) when publicizing an event. For communities who require these access measures, this info is just as important as the date and location!
- For some starting points to create more accessible events, we might suggest:
  - [Practicing Inclusion in the Time of Covid](#) (from Strategies for High Impact)

- [Ability Access / Disability Inclusion Checklist for Marches and Rallies](#) (Action Network)
- [How to Make Your Social Justice Events Accessible to the Disability Community: A Checklist](#) (Rooted in Rights)

## Alt text and image descriptions

- Images should be accompanied by [alt text and / or image descriptions](#) (preferably both where possible). This improves accessibility for the Blind and low vision community; those with some visual processing differences; and people who may benefit from more context
- When sending photos to others (such as journalists), make accessibility easy by sending them the alt text / image description wording at the same time if possible!
- Use alt text on social media - almost all social media platforms have dedicated spots for it. [Find instructions here](#)
- Consider representation when describing an image. A few examples:
  - We mention visible respirators and other Covid safety measures, as well as things like disability aids, rather than omitting them (unless asked to do otherwise)
  - Avoid making assumptions about an individual's identity (such as their gender) based solely on appearance
  - If mentioning race, remember to mention when folks are white as well (rather than leaving white as a sort of assumed "default")

## Content warnings

- Include content notes ahead of material that may pose hazards, such as:
  - Flashing in videos or GIFs (which may trigger seizures, migraines, etc.)
  - Spinning / disorienting video content
  - Graphic or violent imagery, or common major trauma triggers

## Formatting and composition

This is a huge topic, but a few basic points:

- Use plain language where possible. Spell out important acronyms if the audience may not know them
- Prioritize easy-to-read fonts in legible sizes. Avoid excessive use of *italics*, ALL-CAPS, or underlining
- Have sufficient contrast between text colours and the background
- Break up “walls of text” with headings, bullet points, or shorter paragraphs
- Use CamelCase hashtags (capitalizing the first letter of each word)
- Caption and/or transcribe audio or video

## Inclusive language

- Respect how individuals and communities identify
- Try to avoid ableist language - a common issue is expressions that use disability, mental illness, or neurodivergence as an insult. For more info, check out:
  - [Glossary of Ableist Language and suggested alternatives](#) (Lydia X. Z. Brown)
  - [Disability Language Style Guide](#) (National Center on Disability and Journalism)
- Same goes for other -isms in language - i.e. racism, sexism, anti-fatness etc.
- Try to use inclusive framing: when directly addressing the public, don't refer to marginalized groups as if they're not also part of the public. Do your best to avoid making assumptions about identity or capacity (not everyone is white, thin, straight, cis, housed, ambulatory, sighted, hearing, immunocompetent, able to leave their home, etc.)