

Accessible Medical Equipment

To raise awareness about disability barriers and increase accessibility of primary health care to people with disabilities, the Illinois Department of Public Health Disability and Health Program, funded through a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, collaborated with statewide disability advocacy organizations to develop a health care facility exam room and medical equipment accessibility survey. Several statewide health care professional organizations assisted to disseminate it. The Illinois Department of Public Health Disability and Health Program reported results of the survey in a prior article. In response to the anonymous, self-report survey, the majority of the 160 respondents indicated a considerable need for accessibility improvements, particularly in regards to the availability of accessible primary medical equipment and other elements within the exam room, as well as staff properly trained in the use of accessible medical equipment.

Although policies, practices and procedures were not included in the survey, it is important to note that Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 require that policies, practices and procedures be reasonably modified or, where necessary, created, to ensure a provider's staff knows how to make available and properly use the accessible equipment unless the provider can demonstrate such modification or creation of a new policy will fundamentally alter the nature of the services. (Department of Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act Title III, C.F.R. §28 36.302, September 15, 2010)

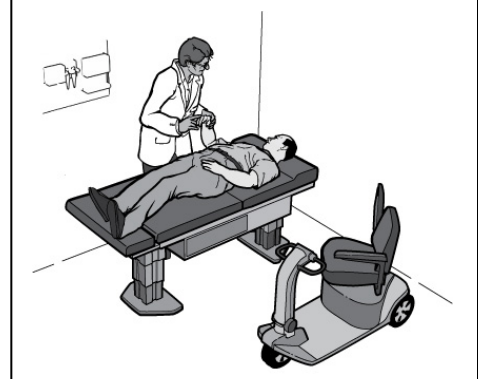
The article below is the third in a series providing recommendations on how to increase accessibility of exam rooms and medical equipment. The following information is an excerpt from the U.S. Department of Justice document, "Americans with Disabilities Act Access to Medical Care for Individuals with Mobility Disabilities, Part 4: Accessible Medical Equipment." The full document may be viewed or downloaded at www.ada.gov/medcare_mobility_ta/medcare_ta.htm or copies may be obtained by calling 800-514-0301 (voice) or 800-514-0383 (TTY).

Accessible Medical Equipment

Availability of accessible medical equipment is an important part of providing accessible medical care, and doctors and other providers must ensure that medical equipment is not a barrier to individuals with disabilities. This section provides examples of accessible medical equipment and how it is used by people with mobility disabilities. Such equipment includes adjustable-height exam tables and chairs, wheelchair-accessible scales, adjustable-height radiologic equipment, portable floor and overhead track lifts, and gurneys and stretchers.

It is essential that a person with a disability receives medical services equal to those received by a person without a disability. For example, if a patient must be lying down to be thoroughly examined, then a person with a disability must also be examined lying down. Likewise, examinations which require specialized positioning, such as gynecological examinations, must be accessible to a person with a disability. To provide an accessible gynecological exam to women with paralysis or other conditions that make it difficult or impossible for them to move or support their legs, the provider may need an accessible height exam table with adjustable, padded leg supports, instead of typical stirrups. However, if the

A patient with a mobility disability is examined while lying down on an adjustable height exam table.



examination or procedure does not require that a person lie down (for example, an examination of the face or an X-ray of the hand), then using an exam table is not necessarily important to the quality of the medical care and the patient may remain seated.

Evaluating the existing equipment available, the space within the examination room, the size of the practice and staff, and the patient population is necessary to determine the equipment needed to provide accessible medical care.

Exam Tables and Chairs

Traditional fixed-height exam tables and chairs (also called treatment tables or procedure tables) are too high for many people with a mobility disability to use. Individuals with mobility disabilities often need to use an adjustable-height table which, when positioned at a low height, allows them to transfer from a wheelchair. A handle or support rail is often needed along one side of the table for stability during a transfer and during the examination.

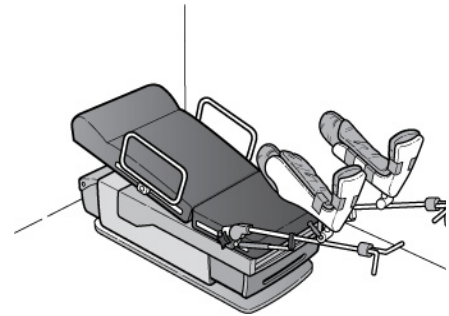
Individuals transfer to and from adjustable-height exam tables and chairs differently. Some will be able to transfer on their own by standing up from a mobility device, pivoting, and sitting down on the exam table. Those using walkers may simply walk to the exam table and sit down, while others with limited mobility may walk more slowly and need a steadying arm or hand to help with balance and sitting down. Some people using wheelchairs may be able to independently transfer to the table or chair, while others will need assistance from a staff member. Transfers may also require use of equipment, such as a transfer board or patient lift.

An accessible exam table or chair should have at least the following:

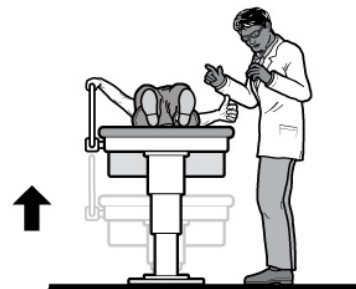
- ability to lower to the height of the wheelchair seat, 17-19 inches, or lower, from the floor; and
- elements to stabilize and support a person during transfer and while on the table, such as rails, straps, stabilization cushions, wedges, or rolled up towels.

Once a patient has transferred, staff should ask if assistance is needed -- some patients may need staff to stay and help undress or stabilize them on the table. Never leave the patient unattended unless the patient says they do not need assistance.

Different types of exam tables are used for different purposes. Some exam tables fold into a chair-like position; others remain flat. Either type can be used by people with disabilities with the right accessible features and table accessories. Pillows, rolled up towels, or foam wedges may be needed to stabilize and position the patient on the table. Tilt, adjustability, and headrests, footrests, and armrests may make the examination more accessible for the patient and also easier for the doctor.



An adjustable height exam table equipped with adjustable padded leg supports.



A patient with a mobility disability is examined while lying down on an adjustable height exam table.

Features of Accessible Exam Tables

