

ADA STANDARDS

Accessibility standards for businesses

Title III of the ADA has different requirements depending on when a restaurant facility first opened and when any major renovations were done on the facility.

- Any facility opening for first occupancy after January 26, 1993, must meet a fairly strict accessibility standard — being "readily accessible" to people with disabilities. That standard applies to everything from parking spaces to entranceways to restrooms.
- Facilities that opened prior to the 1993 cutoff are not required to provide full accessibility. However, any major renovations on older construction — that took place after January 26, 1992 — must make the altered areas readily accessible to individuals with disabilities, to the maximum extent feasible.
- The ADA also requires facilities that opened prior to the 1993 cutoff to remove architectural and communication barriers when such changes are "readily achievable." "Readily achievable" changes are those that are easy to carry out without much difficulty or expense. Some readily achievable ways to remove barriers may include installing ramps, repositioning paper-towel dispensers and widening doors. What's readily achievable for one restaurant may not be for another, depending on factors such as the restaurant's layout and revenue.

Self-inspection checklist

Use the checklists below to see whether your operation meets the ADA's standards for "ready accessibility."

Note: The standards used here are drawn from the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG), developed by a governmental advisory group known as the "Access Board" (officially, the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board). In late 1999, the Access Board proposed nearly 800 revisions to the ADAAG; these changes are still pending. [Read the National Restaurant Association's issue brief on the proposed ADAAG changes.](#)

1. Getting into the restaurant

Customers with disabilities should be able to arrive on the site, approach the building, and enter the restaurant as conveniently as everyone else. At least one path of travel should be safe and accessible for everyone, including people with mobility or visual disabilities. Items to check for include:

- If you have on-site parking, are there sufficient designated and marked accessible parking spaces? Each accessible space should be at least 8-foot wide with a marked 5-foot wide minimum level access aisle next to it.
- Are the accessible spaces the ones closest to the accessible entrance, and are they marked with the international symbol of accessibility?
- Can at least one in every eight accessible spaces accommodate a lift-equipped van?

- Is there a continuous, unobstructed path of travel from on-site parking, drop-offs, bus stops and public sidewalks to the restaurant entry that is free of stairs? The path should be at least 36 inches wide.
- Is the path of travel free of cracks, bumps and other surface irregularities that could cause someone to trip or fall?
- Do curbs along the path of travel have curb cuts or ramps?
- Are there continuous handrails at both sides of all stairways?
- Are ramp slopes safe and convenient for people using wheelchairs?
- Are ramp surfaces stable, firm and nonslip?
- Do all ramps longer than 6 feet have sturdy and secure railings on both sides?
- Are at least 50 percent of all public entrances accessible? For example, do entrance doors have at least a 32-inch clear opening, and are door handles no higher than 48 inches and possible to operate by someone with limited use of his or her hands?
- If any customer entrance is not accessible, is it posted with a visible sign that clearly indicates the location of the accessible entrance?

Access to foodservice areas

The layout of the restaurant should, as much as possible, allow people with disabilities to participate in and enjoy their dining experience in the same manner as other customers. Remove barriers to waiting, food-ordering, self-service and dining areas if doing so is readily achievable. Modifications that result in significant loss of sales space are not required. Items to check for include:

- Are pathways to foodservice areas free of stairs?
- Are all aisles and pathways at least 36 inches wide?
- Are there clear floor areas located throughout for a person using a wheelchair to reverse direction?
- Is the path of travel free of protruding objects that pose hazards for people with visual disabilities?
- At counters and bars that exceed 34 inches in height, is there also a portion of the main counter that is between 28 and 34 inches high and at least 60 inches in length? Or is service available at accessible tables or counters within the same area?
- Are queues or serpentine waiting lines at ordering counters at least 36 inches wide to allow passage by people who use wheelchairs?

- Is there a portion of food-ordering counters that is no more than 36 inches high, or is there space at the side for passing items to customers who have difficulty reaching over a high counter?
- Are at least 50 percent of all self-service shelves at foodservice lines within reach of a person using a wheelchair?
- Are self-service shelves and dispensing devices for tableware, dishes and condiments within reach of a person using a wheelchair?

Access to public restrooms

When restrooms are open to the public, they should be accessible to customers with disabilities. Items to check for include:

- Is the path of travel to the public restroom at least 36 inches wide?
- If there are stairs leading to public restrooms, are there continuous handrails on both sides of the stairs?
- Are there signs at inaccessible restrooms that give directions to accessible restrooms?
- Are there raised lettering and Braille signs identifying restrooms?
- Is the restroom doorway at least 32 inches wide?
- Is at least one accessible toilet stall?
- At accessible toilets, are there grab bars behind and on the side wall nearest the toilet, or on both side walls of a 36-inch wide alternative toilet stall?
- Is the faucet control easy to grasp with one hand, and can it be operated without tight grasping, tight pinching or twisting of the wrist?
- Is at least one of each control, dispenser, receptacle or other equipment located within reach of a person using a wheelchair?

Other access

When amenities such as public telephones and drinking fountains are provided to the general public, they should also be accessible to customers with disabilities. Items to check for include:

- Is the path of travel to the public telephones and drinking fountains at least 36 inches wide?
- Is there clear floor space of at least 30 to 48 inches in front of the phone?
- Is the phone hearing-aid compatible and adapted with volume control?
- If drinking fountains are provided, is there one that has both high and low spouts so that it is accessible to people who use wheelchairs and to those who have difficulty bending or stooping?