

Information About the ADA and Restaurants

What is the ADA?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law that gives people with disabilities equal rights to work, receive government services, and go to public places such as restaurants.

What does the ADA have to do with restaurants?

Under the ADA, private businesses that provide goods or services to the public are called “public accommodations.” The ADA says that public accommodations must be accessible to people with disabilities. People with disabilities have to be able to enter a restaurant and access the restaurant’s goods and services.

What is needed to make a restaurant accessible?

Below are some basic ADA accessibility requirements for restaurants. All of the ADA requirements can be found at <http://www.access-board.gov/adaag/html/adaag/htm>.

- **Entrance Way** – An entrance should be wide enough for a person using a wheelchair. This usually means an entrance at least 32 inches wide. Doors should have handles or levers that can be opened with a closed fist.
- **Path of Travel** – Paths of travel in the restaurant should be at least 36 inches wide so that a person using a wheelchair can access waiting areas, restrooms, food bars, and entertainment areas.
- **Dining Areas** – To be accessible for people who use a wheelchair, table-tops should be between 28 and 34 inches in height, with a knee clearance of at least 27 inches high, 30 inches wide and 19 inches deep. In new construction, all dining areas must be accessible. For others, accessibility to all areas is not required but an alternative accessible area, open to the general public and with the same services and décor must be available.

- **Counters and Bars** – If a counter or bar exceeds 34 inches in height, a 60 inch length should be between 28 and 34 inches high. If this is not possible, then restaurant services must be available at accessible tables or counters within the same area.
- **Menus** – For individuals who are blind or have low vision, restaurants should offer menus in an alternative format, such as Braille or large print. If this is not feasible, restaurants should train staff on how to assist customers who are blind or have low vision.
- **Restrooms** – The restroom must be accessible for people with disabilities. This may require widening restroom stalls, installing grab bars, and lowering soap and towel dispensers.
- **Service Animals** – If an individual uses a service animal a restaurant must permit the animal entry. Such a reasonable accommodation does not violate health codes.

Does the ADA apply to all restaurants?

Yes. If the building was built or altered after 1992, the restaurant must meet all ADA requirements. If the building was built before then, the restaurant must meet all ADA requirements that are “readily achievable.” Whether something is “readily achievable” depends on its costs and the restaurant’s resources. Meeting ADA standards is an ongoing requirement. For example, if installing an elevator to reach a second floor is not “readily achievable” today, it may be in the future when the restaurant becomes more profitable.

Resources

For information about American Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines:

United States Access Board

Phone (voice): (202) 272-0080 toll free: (800) 872-2253

Phone (TTY): (202) 272-0082 toll free: (800) 993-2822

Fax: (202) 272-0081

Website: www.access-board.gov

E-mail: info@access-board.gov

For information and technical assistance on the American Disabilities Act:

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section - NYA

Phone (voice): 800-514-0301

Phone (TTY): 800-514-0383

Fax: (202) 307-11298

Website: www.ada.gov

For technical assistance contact the regional Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center:

DBTAC – Mid-Atlantic ADA Center

TransCen, Inc. Phone: (301) 217-0124 (V/TTY)

Fax: (301) 217-0754

E-mail: adainfo@transcen.org

Web site: www.adainfo.org

Contact disAbility Law Center of Virginia

1512 Willow Lawn Drive, Suite 100

Richmond, Virginia 23230

Call: 800-552-3962 or 804-225-2042

Fax: 804-662-7057

Email: info@dLCV.org

Web: www.dLCV.org

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