Everyone benefits when doctors and their staff use easy-to-read signs.

Our non-profit group has produced some easy-to-read signs for doctors’ offices. The signs are free to print and use.

Clear signage helps everyone. It is especially important for these groups:
- Adults with lower literacy skills
- Adults learning English as a second language
- Seniors with mild dementia
- Adults with vision loss
- Adults with developmental disabilities
- Patients who are scared or upset about an illness

Can you understand the sign below? Confusing, isn’t it? That’s how some people may feel when they try to read signs in medical offices.

Please be advised that not all services are covered by provincial health care.

Before and after
Compare these two signs.

Alberta Health Care does not pay for some services. For example:
- Prescriptions
- Glasses
- An ambulance

Questions? Talk to someone at the front desk.

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Guidelines for easy-to-read signs

Sample signs
- No food, No drinks
- No gum
- Alberta Health Care
- Free flu shots
- Turn off cellphone
- New contact info
- No perfume
- Use hand cleaner
- Pregnant? Tell us
- Have a cough? Use a mask
- Remove dirty shoes
- Please check in
- Next appointment
- Open, closed

Other resources
Q & A
Posting tips
Comments
Tips for making easy-to-read signs

- Make the signs large enough so readers can see them from a distance.
- Don’t use a glossy finish. Choose a matte finish if laminating.
- Choose a simple, easy-to-read font. Our reviewers preferred a sans serif font (no curly parts) for signs with a small amount of text.
  
  Serif font
  
  Sans serif font

Some simple sans serif fonts include: Arial, Helvetica, Helvetica Neue, Verdana.

- If possible, use colour to liven up signs and convey meaning.

- Reverse type is hard to read (e.g., white text on a black background). Use sparingly.

- Most text should be black on a white or very light background.

- Don’t use ALL CAPS. All caps are more difficult to read than upper and lower case letters. For emphasis, use bold text or colour.

- Blocks of text should be flush left (also called ragged right).

  
  flush left | centred | justified

- Use as few words as possible. Avoid unnecessary or difficult words and phrases.

- Try to have only one message per sign.

- Include meaningful images to help the reader understand the text.

- Remember that readers may not understand “funny” signs.

- Get feedback about signs from the intended audience.

Caution: Some signs may require approval from your organization, a professional body or government department.

Try it

Can you make this sign easier to read and understand?

REFRAIN FROM WEARING PERFUME AT THE DOCTOR’S OFFICE. SCENTED PRODUCTS CAN AGGRAVATE HEALTH PROBLEMS FOR SOME PEOPLE.
No food.
Some people have food allergies.

No drinks.
Water is okay.
Please

No food.

Some people have food allergies.

Please

No drinks.

Water is okay.
Please
No gum

Allergy alert!
Please
No gum
Some people are allergic to chemicals in gum.
Alberta Health Care does not pay for some services. For example:

- prescriptions
- glasses
- an ambulance

Questions? Talk to someone at the front desk.
Free flu shots here.

Flu shots can help protect you from the flu.
Free flu shots here.

Flu shots can help protect you from the flu.
Please turn off your cellphone.
Please turn off your cellphone.

Please step outside to use your cellphone.
New address?
New phone number?
New health care information?
We need to know.

Please stop at the front desk.
New address?
New phone number?
New health care information?

Please let us know.
Allergy alert!

Please do not wear perfume or anything with a smell to the doctor’s office.
Allergy alert!

Please do not wear perfume or anything with a smell to this office.
Allergy alert!

Please do not wear perfume to the doctor’s office.

Perfumes can be in:
- soap
- deodorant
- hairspray
- talc
- lotion
- aftershave

Perfumes can make some people sick.
Please use this hand cleaner:

- when you arrive
- when you leave
Please use this hand cleaner.

- Use it when you arrive.
- Use it when you leave.
Pregnant?
Maybe pregnant?

Tell us *before* you have an x-ray.
Pregnant?
Maybe pregnant?

Tell us **before**
you have an x-ray.
Do you have a cough?

Please use a mask.
Do you have a cough?

Please ask for a mask.
Please take off dirty or wet shoes and boots. Thanks!
Please check in at the front desk.

Please check in here.
Do you need to see the doctor again?

Next appointment

Name __________________________

Date __________________________

Time __________________________

Stop at the front desk.
Closed
Other resources

Easy-to-read posters about the flu, handwashing, fitness and safety

Health Canada—flu posters

Public Health Agency of Canada—Stay safe poster for seniors,
Eat well and be active poster (24x36 inches/61x92 cm)

Do Bugs Need Drugs?—Handwashing poster

Alberta Health and Wellness—Cover cough poster

Alberta Health Services—Handwashing posters
http://www8.albertahealthservices.ca/Hand-Washing-Posters.html
http://www.tinyurl.com/CHHandWashing

Vancouver Coastal Health—How to wash your hands;
Handwashing poster (Multilingual)
www.vch.ca/staying_healthy/communicable_diseases/educational_materials/

Do you know of other easy-to-read health posters? Please let us know so we can add them to this list.
# Pre-testing comments

Volunteers reviewed drafts of our signs. Here are some of their comments:

## Likes

- size of text
- sans serif text
- bold text
- images on every sign
- the word “please”
- yellow background
- the simpler the better

## Dislikes

- showing someone getting a shot
- difficult words, e.g., technologist, reception, sanitizer, refrain, avoid, physician

## Other suggestions

- Try to keep signs positive.
- Warn patients about perfumes ahead of time (e.g., when staff confirm an appointment or when a patient makes an appointment). Also, have a note to give patients as a reminder.
- Sometimes you need to explain the “why” behind the action requested on the sign.

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**User comments**

“Love the work you are doing on the signs. They will be a big help to our patients. The layout, colour and concepts are right on target.”

—Dr. T. Vu’s office staff, Edmonton

“Thanks for the great job on the signs. Good photography; very professionally done and graphically informative. They are already being used in our office of seven physicians! We hope these easy-to-read signs will help us communicate with our patients.”

—Abbottsfield Medical Group, Edmonton

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Thanks to the volunteers who have reviewed the signs.

The sign project is a work in progress. We welcome your feedback.
Q & A

Where can I get information about the sign project?
Contact Bev Burke.
Phone: 780-440-9833 (in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)
Email: bev@simplyput.ca

Who can use the signs?
The signs are free for non-commercial use.

Where can I download a PDF of this booklet?
Go to the Northeast Edmonton Literacy Network blog at:
http://literacyfriendly.wordpress.com/

Posting tips

- Print the signs on heavier paper to make them more durable. For example: 65 lb. card stock.
- Laminating the signs works well. But use a matte finish. The glare from a glossy finish makes indoor signs harder to read. You might have to look around to find a business that does matte laminating, but it is worth the extra effort.
- Try using removable adhesive putty rather than tape to put up your signs.
- Get feedback about the signs from patients.

The sign project is a work in progress. Check our blog for updates:
http://literacyfriendly.wordpress.com/

Are you making your office more literacy friendly? Great! We’d love to send you our special decal. Contact Susan to receive a decal: sskaret@telus.net