

# Protesting Safety Guide

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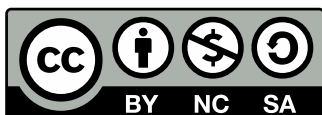
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# Before you go (1 of 3)

Before committing yourself to attending a protest, do some research into the organizers and the cause they are protesting for. Make sure it's something aligned with your values, that you're willing to fight for. Attending protests carries a risk of emotional distress, bodily harm, and/or arrest.

Try to find out who the legal person/legal team is for the protest organizers, and note down their contact info in case you are arrested.

USA only - If there is no designated legal point of contact for the protest (or even if there is), it's a good idea to contact the National Lawyers Guild chapter for your region and request "legal observers" for the protest action. Your local NLG chapter may also have a phone hotline for legal assistance in case you or a comrade is arrested. See this webpage: [Chapters | National Lawyers Guild](#)

Find out if there will be medics on site at the protest, and know how to find them if needed. You should also make note of any walk-in health clinics/urgent care centers/emergency rooms that are within walking distance of the protest location.

Have a friend/support person who will not be at the protest, and give them a list of your emergency contacts (including legal help), medications, medical conditions, and phone calls that should be made if you are arrested.

Avoid posting on social media that you will be attending a protest action. Cops, employers, random bigoted vigilantes, family members who disagree with the cause, etc. can use this information against you.

If you have tattoos, distinctive hair color/style, identifiable scarring, etc. make sure these are all covered.

If you are visibly disabled, this makes you more identifiable. If possible, use plain, standard personal aid devices during the protest (e.g. black metal, plain wood, anything that won't stand out as "unique to you".) Be aware that personal aid devices will be taken from you at booking if you are arrested, but you might get them back while in jail.

See this PDF for more info on protesting/being arrested while disabled: [A Legal Guide For Activists With Physical Disabilities and Health Issues](#)

If you have a Medic-Alert bracelet or similar, be sure to wear it. If you are arrested, this can increase the chances for you to get proper medical attention while detained.

Avoid wearing contact lenses, as you will be more affected by tear gas if it is used.

Try to dress in similar clothing as other people will be wearing, so you can "blend in".

Wear comfortable, sturdy shoes. These should also be bland and plain, not personally-identifiable.

If possible, wear clothing you are okay with throwing away afterward. DaShaunLH on Twitter offered this tip "to make sure clothing that police can ID you with is no longer in your home should you be caught on camera." Your clothes may also become contaminated with tear gas or other chemical weapons.

Sew your pockets closed or close them with safety pins. Cops have been known to plant illegal items in protesters' pockets to get an arrest.

If at all possible, attend the protest with one or more buddies. Having friend(s) with you can make a world of difference if you are harmed/harassed/arrested during the protest. Establish a meeting spot away from the protest in the event that your group gets separated.

# Before you go (2 of 3)

Bring plenty of water or sport drinks, and energy-rich snacks like protein bars. Consider bringing extra food and drink to share with your comrades. (Avoid food with nuts, dairy, and other common allergens.)

Some guides will advise you to bring milk or other concoctions to wash your eyes out if you are tear gassed, but plain cold water or saline solution are actually your safest bets. See this article for more info: [Why Milk Isn't the Safest Tear Gas Treatment](#)

If you are on medications you take regularly, bring a printed letter from your doctor stating what your meds are and how often you take them. The letter should also clearly state if you are supposed to self-administer the medication, and if you have any food allergies. This letter can increase the chance that you receive your proper food and meds while detained. Make sure your support person away from the protest has a copy too. If possible, give another copy of this letter to the legal staff of the organization behind the protest action.

If you are bringing medications with you, bring it in the original container (preferably with your name on it). For over-the-counter meds, some pharmacies can still put it in a container with your name if you ask them.

Do not bring marijuana or other "controversial" substances, even for medical reasons.

If you have asthma/allergies, bring your inhaler/epi-pen. Consider bringing multiple inhalers/epi-pens in case a comrade needs one.

## **Consider not bringing your cell phone**

it can be tracked and used against you. A prepaid mobile phone with a different number can be used to communicate instead.

## **If you do bring your cell phone**

Have a backup of any important data. (Wise advice for life in general.)

Enable full-disc encryption if your device has this option. (This will not encrypt SD cards or other removable media, so you may want to leave those at home.)

Turn on airplane mode. Turn off wi-fi, bluetooth, and location services.

Turn off any biometric unlocking features (Face ID, fingerprint, etc.) The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) says that "there is currently less [legal] protection against compelled face and fingerprint unlocking than there is against compelled password disclosure." Use a strong passcode that you know you can remember easily.

Download Signal or a similar encrypted, secure messaging app if you will be messaging anyone during the protest. Normal text messages and social media DMs are not as private as you might think.

Be aware of how to take photos/videos without unlocking your phone.

Read this guide from the EFF for more detailed info on protecting your phone at a protest:

- <https://ssd.eff.org/module/attending-protest>

# Before you go (3 of 3)

## If you're making a sign:

Keep the design simple and easy to read. (Limited colors, not too much text or extraneous decoration, make sure the text stands out against the background)

Use foam-core board (lightweight and stays rigid) or lightweight cardboard.

Your sign's message doesn't have to be 100% original, but if you quote someone, be sure to include their name. (E.g. "I am not free while any woman is unfree - Audre Lorde")

Practice holding and carrying the sign, as this may get tiring during the protest.

Write the phone numbers of your emergency contacts (including legal help) on your body with a permanent marker. (Somewhere covered by clothing [e.g. on your upper arm or stomach] is best; if cops see it during the protest they may target you.)

Consider your transportation to and from the protest carefully. The EFF says that in the USA and many other countries, "your location can be tracked over time based on the driving history of any car registered to you, with very few legal limits in place as to how this data can be collected, accessed, shared, and retained." Your use of public transportation may also be tracked, depending on how you pay for it; cash is less trackable than a credit card or bus pass, but you might be caught on surveillance cameras in the bus regardless. For these reasons, walking or biking is ideal if you are physically able to do so.

If you are sensitive to noise, bring earplugs or other sound-dampening devices.

On the days leading up to the protest, take time engaging in practices that help you feel relaxed/grounded/motivated. This could be listening to music, meditating, making art, physical activity, or anything else you like.

If you can, schedule some time off work after the day of the protest to catch up on spoons. However, avoid telling your employer that you are going to be at a protest, since they may not agree with the cause and could use that against you (even unconsciously).



# During the event

Wear a mask to protect yourself and other people from COVID-19 and other contagious illnesses. N95 is best, but any mask is better than none.

A mask also helps keep you semi-anonymous (assuming you wear a plain one with no distinctive design).

Do not geotag or otherwise share your location on social media while at the event.

## **If there are counter-protestors**

avoid engaging with them verbally or physically. It might seem fun to “dunk on the haters” but this can escalate and lead to a range of very negative outcomes, especially if law enforcement or general public sentiment is on their side. Instead of engaging with bigots, you can block them from view with flags/banners/signs, or drown them out with loud music, chanting, whistles, etc.

## **If you witness police misconduct or people being arrested,**

take photos/video. Try to get the names, badge numbers, and car numbers of the officers involved. (In the USA, you can report police misconduct to BlackLine by calling or texting 1-800-604-5841.)

## **If chemical weapons (e.g. tear gas/pepper spray) are used:**

Try to stay calm and move to an area with fresh air.

Even if you don't feel like it's affecting you, you still risk sickness from staying in an area with tear gas.

Shout out that you need a medic. If you can't find one at the protest, you can leave and find an urgent care clinic or similar healthcare facility.

Rinse your face and eyes with clean water or saline solution.

Get out of your contaminated clothes as soon as possible. Put them in a sealed bag and throw them away, or else wash them multiple times with strong detergent.

At your next shower/bath, use the coldest water you can tolerate (warm water can reactivate the chemicals) and use lots of soap.



## **If you are arrested**

Do not talk to the police until after conferring privately with a defense attorney.<sup>1</sup>

Cops can and will lie to get information/a confession out of you.

Do not expect that cops will go easy on you if you are visibly disabled.

If you have pain, numbness, or tingling in your hands after being handcuffed, immediately request that looser cuffs be put on. If one officer refuses, ask another and don't stop asking until they do it.

If you think you may need medical attention while being detained, request it as soon as possible, since the cops are likely to take their sweet time getting you help. You will likely need to "be a nuisance about it"; i.e. ask multiple times.

Make mental note of any delays in medical treatment or other mistreatment you suffered while detained, and let your attorney know about it in detail. This kind of stuff can be useful "leverage" to bring up at your bail hearing.

See this guide from the Boston Area Liberation Medic Squad for more info: <https://www.bostoncoop.net/~balm/arrested.html>

# After the event

Contact your support person and let them know how things went.

If you were exposed to chemical weapons, your liver will be working hard to rid your body of those toxins, so you should avoid alcohol and recreational drugs for a week or so. Drinking lots of water will also help.

Sharing photos/video from the protest can be powerful, but remember to keep the participants anonymous! You can use this tool to remove metadata and selectively blur any photos: <https://everestpipkin.github.io/image-scrubber/>

Be sure to completely delete the original unaltered photos/videos!!

Footage or photos of cops, counter-protesters, and other aggressors do not need to be blurred out; they should (ideally) be held accountable for their actions.

Even if the protest went well, you might feel stressed afterwards. Take some time for self-care. Journaling (privately) about your experience is one of many options that can help ground you.

Reach out to one of the resources on <https://linktr.ee/safersupport> if you need someone to listen.

Take COVID tests the week after, and mask around others for up to 5 days, since the risk for infection is so much higher at larger events.