

Information on Face Coverings For Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Blind Community Members

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Wearing face coverings if you are hard of hearing

If you use hearing aids, the ear loops from the face covering may cause feedback when wearing a face covering. You also may inadvertently pull your hearing aids out and drop them when removing your face covering.

- Wear a face covering with soft fabric ties to relieve the pressure on the ears, instead of elastic
- Use a special face covering extender with buttons or other holders to attach the mask loops onto, on the back of the head, instead of the ears (many medical practitioners now use these, since they have to wear tight-fitting face coverings all day)
- Use simple tools like plastic s-hooks to loop the face covering onto, instead of your ears

[This 1-hour webinar offers some solutions on how to wear face coverings if you have hearing aids, cochlear implants and glasses.](#)

Tips for navigating face coverings

When you and/or others are wearing a face covering, the following suggestions may help with communication barriers:

- Communication aids, like [print-outs](#) or [visual tools](#)
- Remote CART
- [Apps like Google LiveTranscribe and many others](#)
- A personal dry-erase board
- FaceTime/video calls (for example, have a doctor safely distance by going to their office to safely remove their mask and talk with you via videophone, or have them text/email)
- Have a loved one listen in by phone and then videoconference with you or email/text the information
- Encourage others to wear a [face covering with a clear panel](#)

Tips for visits to the hospital or doctor's office

[Communicating in a medical setting may have unique challenges.](#) Medical professionals will wear face coverings. They may also talk to you from behind a window or curtain. [Here is how you can prepare for a hospital visit.](#)

[If you have a smartphone, load the apps you need to communicate, and bring your smartphone with you.](#)

- Before arriving at the hospital, download several VRI apps and/or speech-to-text apps. Some options are free.
- Test the apps at home before you go to the hospital.
- You may have to rely on cellular connection if there is no Wi-Fi.
- Upon arrival, request Wi-Fi access, emphasizing the need for a strong signal.

- Ask hospital staff to communicate via smartphone with VRI or speech-to-text apps.

If you do not have a smartphone, come prepared with writing materials.

Arrive prepared at the hospital with the following as needed:

- Paper and pens or markers
- Smartphone chargers
- Tablets and/or laptops and chargers
- A cellular hotspot in case of unreliable Wi-Fi
- An extension cord or power strip to ensure outlet access
- Extra eyewear supplies, such as reading glasses to read the speech to text on a phone app
- Extra batteries for hearing aids, cochlear implants, or assistive listening device
- A copy of your [advance medical directive](#)
- Emergency contact information
- Communication cards including [a sample medical placard](#) and [a printable communication aid](#)

Information for DeafBlind community members

Touch is the most important communication method for people who are deaf-blind. COVID-19 can spread through physical contact yet social distancing makes communication for deaf-blind people nearly impossible. Tactile ASL, for example, requires close contact. Also notably, deafblind people can't read braille if wearing gloves.

Tips for DeafBlind communication

- Wear gloves for tactile ASL or printing capital letters into the person's palm. To safely remove gloves peel them off inside out and dispose in a separate bag and then garbage container. Do not touch face.
- Use a communication card in [English](#) or [Spanish](#) to assist in interacting with the general public as well as medical personnel.
- Use an iOS device with a braille display, screen reader or low vision enhancements such as high contrast or enlarged print to email and/or text messages with family, friends, medical professionals, SSPs, or others.
- Use Assistive Listening Devices along with a pre-made card describing how to use the microphone of an assistive device. Wipe down microphone and receiver regularly with sanitized wipes.
- When visiting the hospital, in addition to the list previously mentioned, be sure to bring:
 - Prescription glasses, magnifier, portable CCTV like Ruby
 - A portable braille device, charger and extra gloves for interpreter use

Tips for the public on communicating with Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

People with hearing loss have a harder time understanding people who are wearing a face covering. The deaf/hard of hearing person relies on cues from facial movements and lipreading.

Things to remember when communicating with a deaf/HOH person

- Wear a clear face shield or [face covering with a clear panel](#) if possible.
- Use alternative means of communication, such as paper, pen or smartphone.
- Ask the person how they prefer to communicate. Not all deaf people sign.
- Articulate clearly but do not over articulate- it makes it harder for someone to lipread you.
- Speak at a normal pace- not too fast and not too slow.
- Be patient! It can also be stressful for a deaf/hard of hearing person if they cannot understand or be understood.

Talking to patients with hearing loss in medical settings

In medical settings, stress levels run high and it is that much more important to have seamless provider-to-patient communication. Face coverings can distort voices and make healthcare providers harder to hear and understand. Hospital settings are also louder. Combined with the loss of visual cues, it is harder for people to distinguish speech sounds.

- Use [a mask with a clear plastic panel](#) like [this option](#) or [this option](#) to make lip reading easier.
- Reduce the room's noise and get the patient's attention.
- Ask how the patient prefers to communicate.
- Speak slowly and clearly .
- Do not shout (this can be painful to a person with hearing loss).
- Make sure the person is wearing their hearing aid(s) or cochlear implant(s).
- Consider using a portable hearing aid amplifier.
- Rephrase remarks if not understood.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Do not talk while walking.

Additional resources

- [10 Tips for managing face masks and hearing loss](#)
- [A tricky combination: face masks, hearing loss and hearing aids](#)
- [How to stop your glasses from fogging up when you wear a mask](#)