

## [Advice and guidance on social distancing and the hearing impaired](#)

This time of social distancing is difficult for everyone, but for people with a hearing impairment it brings many additional challenges. Barriers to communication have been increased in this current climate of distancing ourselves.

### **Distancing makes things harder**

If someone with a hearing impairment uses any type of listening device we generally advise that you stand closer than 2 meters to allow their listening device to pick up speech without other environmental sounds getting in the way. However, we are now being advised to stand at least two meters apart.

Physical distance immediately make things more challenging for someone with a hearing impairment. It is harder for them to hear your voice, it makes lip reading difficult and they lose many of the other signals they rely upon to help interpret information.

### **Video calls makes things harder**

At a time when many of us are communicating more with friends, family and work colleagues through the use of video calling and conferencing, hearing impaired people may find themselves more isolated. Trying to follow a call with multiple people, all talking together and sometimes over the top of each other may be an impossible task for someone with a hearing impairment. Even with the use of live captioning you have to rely on a very disciplined group and this can be hard to manage. It is very easy for a hearing-impaired person to be left out and at a social disadvantage.

### **Facemasks make things harder**

The use of face masks as a way of protecting ourselves from the spread of Covid-19 has made the reading of lip pattern an impossible task for hearing-impaired people. Many people with a hearing loss rely heavily on lip pattern to consolidate speech and without it a majority would struggle to understand what is being said to them. The problem for hearing impaired people at the moment is that if they ask someone to take their mask off then they may be putting themselves or the other

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person at risk. I have seen some masks with a transparent plastic mouth piece but these appear to be prototypes and not widely available. With talk of the potential of having to wear face masks in the months to come this will be a very real issue for those reliant on lip reading.

These are just a few of the issues a person with a hearing impairment may face and for some individuals there may be many more. There are things you can do to help.

### **Five things to improve communication during Covid-19:**

1. When talking to someone with a hearing impairment face to face, look for somewhere quiet to go with minimal background noise.
2. Use an increased level to your voice but do not shout. Keep information simple, clear and concise so as not to over complicate the information being shared.
3. Where possible and safe, avoid wearing anything that obscures your mouth or muffles your voice. If it is necessary to use Personal Protective Equipment seek to find something deaf friendly. Consider if they can see your lip patterns.
4. If using video calls, where possible limit it to just yourself and the person with the hearing impairment. This means they only have to listen to one person and they should be able to follow your lip patterns. With just one person the use of live captioning should be much more successful and therefore beneficial.
5. If a friend, family member or work colleague does have a hearing impairment check in with them. In the current climate it would be very easy for them to become even more isolated than usual. Don't be afraid to ask them what is the easiest way to communicate with them at the moment. Take the time.

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