

REOPENING RI

Effective communications with Deaf, Deaf-blind, and hard-of-hearing persons when wearing face coverings



Face coverings are new to all of us. This is the time for us all to learn how we can communicate in ways that work for everyone.

Wearing facemasks to prevent the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) presents unique challenges to the Deaf, Deaf-blind, and Hard-of-Hearing community.¹

However, communicating through face coverings is doable. It takes patience, compassion, and empathy. Each of us needs to take extra steps to break down the barriers.

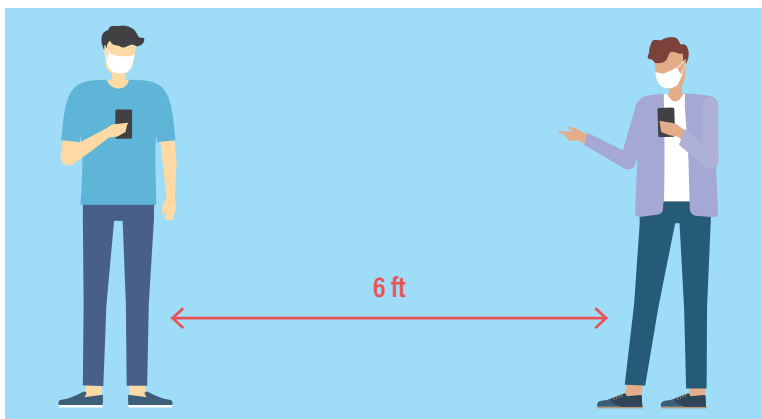
Communication is not just what we hear, but also what we see. It involves body language and facial expressions. The Deaf, Deaf-blind, and Hard-of-Hearing community relies heavily on these non-verbal cues to communicate. These non-verbal cues can vary across cultures and individuals. When wearing a face covering, we can't see facial expressions as clearly.

FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:

- **Consider the language and hearing abilities** of the person you are communicating with. The person may respond verbally or may write their responses.
- **Speak clearly and slowly.** You usually **don't need to speak louder.**
- Use your voice to **convey more expression** than you typically would.
- **Ask, listen,** and **read** responses carefully.
- Be sure to make **eye contact.**

FOR SAFE COMMUNICATION:

- **Maintain a distance of six feet.** Avoid decreasing distance even if you experience difficulties communicating.
- **Avoid touching common objects.** Each person should use their own device, or pen and paper, to communicate.
- **Text, set down, step back.** Once you've written or typed your text, set it down where the other person doesn't need to touch it



¹ Around 48 million people have hearing loss in at least one ear in the United States. Around 2.5 million people use American Sign Language. Others use some combination of speaking, listening, and lipreading with the support of assistive devices and mobile communications technology. Face coverings that are see-through can help, especially for those who use lipreading.