



Tips for Communicating with Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Individuals During Emergency Response and Recovery

Face coverings impede the ability to see important facial expressions and mouth movements. Use a clear face mask or covering so individuals with hearing loss can lipread. Maintain good eye contact and use gestures to assist in communication. **Most importantly, ask the individual for their preferred methods of communication.** There may be communication frustrations on both sides, especially in an emergency. Patience goes a long way to relieve these frustrations.

Deaf Individuals (Severe to Profound Hearing Loss: Use Visual Communication)

- Use a licensed American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter. Provide PPE, gloves and face coverings to ASL interpreters who are requested for their services.
- If there is a challenge finding an on-site interpreter, use video remote interpreting (VRI). Do not use family or friends to interpret.
- Communicate directly with the Deaf individual (not the interpreter), i.e., What is your address? Are you currently taking medications?
- To gain attention, wave hands, flick a light switch, tap gently on shoulder.
- Do not rely solely on written English. English and ASL have different sentence structures so this may make written English difficult for the ASL user to understand.

Hard of Hearing Individuals (Mild to Severe Hearing Loss: Use Verbal Communication)

- Write instructions on dry-erase boards, paper, computer tablet, apps, or draw diagrams.
- Use amplification devices such as hearing aids or personal amplifiers – ensure that batteries work
- Communicate in a quiet and well lightened environment with little background noise when possible.
- Schedule Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning to communicate.
- Ensure your face and mouth are visible (use a mask or face covering that is see-through if you are able).
- If a television is present to the public, please ensure that closed captions are always turned on.
- Use speech to text apps for quick simple communication such as, but not limited to: Google Live Transcribe, Ava, Otter Ai, Microsoft Translator, etc.

DeafBlind Individuals (Dual Hearing and Vision Loss: Communication Modes Vary)

- May require specialized interpreters able to provide tactile or close-vision sign language.
- May be accompanied by a Support Service Provider (SSP). Do not confuse an SSP with an interpreter.
- Provide PPE, gloves and masks or face coverings to Support Service Providers who were requested for their services.
- Visual acuity needs will vary. Some adaptations may be include using a black felt-tip marker for written communication, larger print, or writing with your finger to trace letters on palm of hand.
- Adjust seat location and lighting upon request.



Virtual Communication

There are several ways to communicate virtually with individuals with hearing loss. Ask the individual for the best way to contact them. Some individuals may not have communication technology.

Phone Relay Service

- Third-party service (similar to professional language interpretation services) to communicate with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals. Some callers may prefer to communicate with you by using their voice while others use a relay operator to voice for them.
- Some relay operators will announce that you are receiving a relay call. A delay of a few seconds in hearing a voice on the phone is normal.
- There may be a short delay in order to allow the relay operator to facilitate messages between you and the caller. Please be patient waiting for a response from the relay operator.
- Relay operators can be of any gender, may be opposite of the caller's apparent gender – don't be surprised.
- Speak directly to a relay user as you would talk to any caller. Do not say to the relay operator "tell her/him"
- Some relay service calls require turn-taking protocols throughout the call. The relay operator will say the words "go-ahead" when it's your turn to speak. When you are finished speaking, say "go-ahead" back to the relay operator.

Phone Direct (non-relay service)

- Phone communication can be achieved with individuals who are hard of hearing without using a third-party service.
- Speak directly into the mouthpiece. Don't use the speaker phone.
- Speak at a normal pace with good volume. Talking too fast will make it difficult to follow the conversation. Talking too slow, overenunciating, or yelling can distort your speech.
- Rephrase if needed and ask for clarification. If a person has difficulty understanding a specific word or phrase, use a different word or phrase to say the same thing.
- Avoid using complex terminology.

Video Platform (services such as Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Adobe Connect, etc.)

When choosing a video platform, some factors to consider include:

- Does it have text or chat box capabilities?
- Does it include multi-conferencing? If so, include an ASL interpreter or remote Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART).

