

Covid-19 response: talking to people with hearing loss

There are 12 million people with hearing loss across the UK – about 1 in 6 of the population. This includes half a million children and over 70% of people over the age of 70.

With Coronavirus, people are increasingly being encouraged to have health and other appointments over the telephone. For many people with hearing loss, telephone conversations will be difficult or impossible, and the visual clues to what someone is saying such as lipreading or facial expressions are not available.

The Accessible Information Standard (AIS) puts a legal requirement on all health and social care providers to identify, record and meet the specific communication needs of people who are deaf or have hearing loss.

For people with severe hearing loss they may have text phones, or other specialist equipment to help with using the telephone but for many people there are some simple tips that can make it easier:

- Shouting won't help: most hearing loss is not about volume. For age related hearing loss people may find high-frequency sounds (such as some voices) and 's', 'f' and 'th' sounds in words difficult to hear. So speak in a normal voice as clearly as possible.
- It can be harder to understand what people are saying over background noise: if you are having a befriending chat find a quiet place to make the call without interruption.
- When you phone start by explaining clearly who you are and where you are telephoning from. Sometimes it can take a short time for people to tune into a voice so you may need to repeat this.
- Generally though don't just repeat yourself: say things differently if the person asks you to repeat something or does not understand what you have said. Put it in context.
- Check someone understands what you have said if it is important.
- Don't give up: if you've tried to say sometime 2 or 3 times don't say "never mind, it doesn't matter" – it does to the person you are talking to.
- If you want to confirm an appointment or delivery, see if the person uses text and send a text with the details.

Information on Coronavirus

If people use sign language, the latest guidance and daily coronavirus briefings are available here <https://signhealth.org.uk/resources/coronavirus/>

More detailed information including advice for contacting the NHS is available at <https://beta.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/coronavirus-response/>