

COVID-19: Effective Communication for Individuals with Hearing Loss

People who have hearing disabilities use different ways to communicate; for example, they may give and receive information through writing or sign language rather than through speech. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that organizations communicate “effectively” with individuals with disabilities. The goal is to ensure that communication with people with disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities.

There are many ways to provide effective communication, including but not limited to:

- Writing communications via pen and paper or devices such as:
 - an iPad,
 - a phone (texting),
 - the UbiDuo- a dual keyboard device vetted by HUIT; meets security requirements for confidential communication, including medical (available for loan through UDR);
- Real-time ASL Interpreting;
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI);
- Captioning or CART;
- Speech-to-text apps;
- Remote meeting/event technology such as Zoom, Teams, etc. for virtual “face-to-face” meetings. Features include video that enables lipreading, audio control, chat box, and ability to utilize VRI and CART (note that enabling the automatic captioning feature at this time, if available in your web conferencing platform, does not provide the level of accuracy necessary for an effective communication accommodation but may be helpful nonetheless).

Best practice is to consult with the individual with hearing loss to determine what is effective for them.

In addition, there are several applications and services that Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing **individuals can install on their own personal devices** which may provide communications functionality. These technologies may be used when communication with an individual who is wearing PPE may inhibit lipreading or other communication techniques. While UDR does not endorse any particular vendor, below is a list of known applications.

The following Speech to Text apps are provided by the National Association for the Deaf:

- [Ava](#) (can type back, many languages) ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- [Google Live Transcribe](#) (can type back, many languages) ([Android](#))
- [Microsoft Translator](#) (can type back, can translate, many languages) ([iOS](#), [Android](#), [Windows](#))
- [Otter.ai](#) (English only) ([iOS](#), [Android](#))

- [Web Captioner](#) (many languages) (universal [web page](#))

The following Typing Back and Forth Apps are provided by the National Association for the Deaf:

- Big Note ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- Cardzilla ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- Google Keep ([iOS](#), [Android](#))
- Sorenson Buzz Cards ([iOS](#), [Android](#))

The following apps are frequently used for captioning, sign language and/or relay and have been vetted by UDR:

- **Clear Captions** – real time captioning for making calls
- **Hamilton Captel** – real time captioning for making calls
- **Sorenson nTouch** – mobile Video Relay Service
- **Purple VRI** – mobile Video Relay Service
- **P3 Mobile** – part of Purple VRI, different platform offers multiple communication options

Personal Protective Equipment-Face Masks

Some individuals with hearing loss may rely on lip-reading to communicate, however, traditional masks that cover the mouth will pose a communication barrier for these individuals. UDR has identified the following adapted masks as possible alternatives to traditional face masks:

- [Safe n' Clear](#)
- [The ClearMask](#)

Best practice is to consult the individual with hearing loss on their preferred method of communication. Always consult with EH&S regarding the effectiveness of face masks.

Due to the current limited supply of adapted masks, other effective communications methods, such as those listed above, will most likely need to be explored.