



March 23, 2020

STATEMENT REGARDING THE CORONAVIRUS AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

During this coronavirus pandemic, it is important that public service providers be reminded of the accessibility needs of hard of hearing persons. We comprise one of the largest categories of persons with disabilities in the world with over 466 million persons having a disabling hearing loss. As well, we include among the most vulnerable persons to severe impacts from coronavirus (COVID-19), as many older adults have a hearing loss in addition to having other disabilities.

The nature of our disability encourages close proximity to hear others. We face challenges with increased social distancing and the use of face masks which impedes lip reading; however, we recognize the importance of these measures for the safety of all.

We recommend that persons communicating with us speak clearly and at a reasonable rate. Ideally, electronic devices such as assistive technology would be used as such devices amplify sound. Alternatives are use of texting on cell phones or writing on paper. In addition, we urge that:

- Information from the media and social media sources be captioned. Many hard of hearing persons require captions to access essential information given fast-changing developments related to the coronavirus.
- Sign language interpreting of media messages be provided given that many deaf persons and some hard of hearing persons rely on this means of communication.
- And where personal interaction is not possible, we urge providers to offer the option of text messaging versus verbal telephone contact, use of a relay service for hard of hearing persons, or use of video communications with the captioning feature enabled; a link to one such method is https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=32&v=EhYdpcaxkIM&feature=emb_logo

We offer the following advice to our community

- Postpone or cancel association meetings if you have not already done so.
- Be sure to have on hand a supply of hearing aid batteries sufficient for a month or more; order by phone or on-line rather than in person.
- If unwell, reschedule appointments with a hearing aid provider.
- Take your assistive listening device with you to communicate with others which will help to increase social distance and reduces reliance on lipreading. Remember to disinfect the device before and after sharing with others.
- Request verbal content be repeated, typed on a cell phone or written down if you do not understand the person.

For more information and resources please go to the IFHOH website: <https://www.ifhoh.org/corona-virus>

We welcome your thoughts and further comments to collectively learn how best to promote and ensure accessibility for hard of hearing persons during a health crisis.

With best regards,

Dr. Ruth Warick, President, International Federation of Hard of Hearing People

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