

Face masks making things tough for the deaf

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(HealthDay)—As the debate over face masks continues, few may realize how the coverings make it hard for the 48 million Americans with hearing loss to communicate with others.

Masks can muffle sound, making it more difficult to understand speech and higher-pitched voices; prevent the ability to read lips and see [facial expressions](#), which help people with hearing loss better understand what they're hearing; and be uncomfortable for people with hearing aids or [cochlear implants](#), hearing experts say.

"Widespread mask use at this critical juncture in the pandemic is key to protecting the public health, but we want to make everyone aware that masks can pose communication challenges for anyone—especially people who are deaf or hard of hearing," said Theresa Rodgers, president of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

"By taking some basic steps, everyone can do their

part to help ensure those with hearing difficulties are better poised to successfully communicate in an environment where mask use is necessary," she added in a ASHA news release.

Here are some tips to improve communication when wearing a mask and talking to someone with hearing loss:

- Consider using a mask with a clear panel over the mouth or using a clear face shield, when appropriate.
- Make sure you have the other person's attention before speaking, face the person directly, and make sure nothing is blocking your view. Move to a quiet place if you can.
- Talk a little louder (but don't shout) and a little slower. Use your hands and your body language to communicate. Ask the person if they understood you. If not, say it a different way or write it down.
- If you're talking with someone new, ask if there's anything you can do to make communication easier for both of you.

For people with [hearing](#) aids or cochlear implants, here are some tips on improving comfort when wearing a mask:

- Secure your device with wig tape or other non-damaging material, like a cloth headband.
- Use a button extender for the mask to attach it behind your head instead of looping the mask over your ears.
- Remove your mask in a safe place, then check your device to make sure it's working.
- Use a mask that has four string ties instead of ear loops.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more on [hearing loss](#).

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