

WEARING A MASK CHANGES COMMUNICATION FOR EVERYONE

Wearing a non-medical mask or face covering helps reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community. The use of non-medical masks and face coverings changes communication for everyone but poses additional challenges for people with hearing loss or communication difficulties.

People with **hearing loss** may experience difficulty hearing in challenging situations such as noisy environments or when speech reading (lip reading) cues and facial expressions are compromised.

- At any point in the school year up to [1 in 5 children in elementary school](#) have some degree of temporary hearing loss (e.g. due to ear infections)
- About 66% of people 70 years and older have hearing loss
- Hearing loss has been identified as the second most common impairment world-wide

People with **communication difficulties** experience problems communicating with others in their preferred language.

- More than [10% of school-aged children](#) have communication difficulties
- At least 30% of [stroke](#) survivors experience communication difficulties
- Up to 90% of people living with Parkinson's disease have difficulty communicating

Hearing loss and communication difficulties may be present from birth, or happen later in life because of disease, injury, etc.

Non-medical masks or face coverings may create communication challenges.

- All masks make voices muffled and harder to hear.
- Cloth masks cover facial expression and prevent speech reading. Without visual cues, people with hearing loss or communication difficulties may have even more trouble understanding what they are hearing.
- People with communication difficulties may not be able to make themselves understood through a cloth mask.

Transparent masks and face shields can help improve communication.

[Transparent masks and face shields](#) allow people with hearing loss to use speech reading to assist with better communication and understanding. They may also help people with communication difficulties participate in conversations and express themselves more easily.

- **Transparent masks** – may be completely clear, or have a see-through panel over the mouth. Transparent masks help people with hearing loss better understand speech in noisy environments.
- **Face shields** – are transparent and extend around the sides of the face and below the chin. If you wear a face shield without a mask, you also need to maintain physical distancing and practice good hand hygiene.

Although transparent masks and face shields allow for speech reading, they may muffle sound more than cloth masks. A voice amplifier may also be needed.

Communication strategies to assist you when wearing any mask or face covering.

- Move to a quiet place, or reduce competing noises in the environment.
- For those who wear hearing aids, ensure they are working well.
- Face your communication partner and make sure nothing is blocking your view.
- Get the attention of your communication partner before you start talking.
- Ask what you can do to make communication easier for both of you.
- Speak a little more slowly and slightly louder than usual, but do not shout or exaggerate your speech.
- Use your eyes, hands and body movements to add more information to your speech.
- Use a voice amplifier.
- Ask if your communication partner understood you. If not, repeat, rephrase or write it down.
- Use speech-to-text apps to transcribe speech in real time.

For more information, please visit:

www.sac-oac.ca