

COVID-19 changes the way many people use their voices.

The global pandemic presents unique communication challenges. As a result, some people may experience voice strain when working. Healthcare providers, educators and service industry workers may be particularly vulnerable.

Challenging conditions in the COVID-19 work environment increase the risk of developing a voice disorder. These factors make workers more prone to voice disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Speaking loudly.

Most workers increase the loudness of their voice when wearing a mask, face covering or Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or using remote communication. The presence of background noise makes workers speak even more loudly.



Poor posture.

People working from home may not have a properly adjusted computer workstation and so have poor posture when speaking.



Poor classroom acoustics.

Poor classroom acoustics can have significant psychological and physical impacts on students and educators.



High stress.

Many workers experience stress, anxiety and high workload during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Masks, face coverings and PPE

- Many workers wear masks and face coverings, which can muffle or distort voices. Face shields and N95 respirators have a greater effect on speech than surgical masks. Even masks with clear panels to allow for speech reading distort voices. Background noise, plexiglass barriers and hearing loss or communication difficulties compound these problems. As well, healthcare workers may wear several types of PPE at once, which makes communication even more challenging.

Working remotely

- People working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic connect with patients, clients, students and colleagues by telephone or video call. Headsets with mounted microphones, cell phones and video calls place more demands on the voice than typical face-to-face conversations. Room acoustics, air humidity and the speaker's posture also influence voice quality when working from home.

Voice is a necessary tool for many occupations.

- A strained [voice](#) may mean no work. Voice disorders among educators may result in missed teaching days, disrupt instructional continuity and can impair student's speech comprehension. Voice disorders can also affect social and professional identity, as well as mental health.
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Help keep your voice healthy



DO:

- Adequately hydrate by drinking water daily.
- Move to a quiet place, or reduce competing noises in the environment.
- Use a voice amplifier.
- Use an amplification distribution system (e.g. in the classroom).
- Rest your voice when you can.
- Use an air humidifier in dry work environments.

AVOID:

- Smoking and second hand smoke.
- Overusing or straining your voice by yelling, shouting or whispering.
- Excessive throat clearing or coughing.
- Alcohol and caffeine.
- Drying medications.

Seek professional help if you are concerned about your voice

- Ask your doctor for a referral to an ENT (otolaryngologist) to rule out or identify any structural abnormalities that can contribute to voice problems.
- Arrange to see a speech-language pathologist for voice assessment and treatment. Publicly funded speech-language pathology services may be available at a hospital or clinic in your area. Health insurance plans may cover private services.
- Consult an audiologist for more information on proper room acoustics, the use of microphones, sound amplification systems and other strategies to assist in maintaining good vocal health.

For help finding a speech-language pathologist or audiologist, visit SAC's [Find a Speech-Language Pathologist or Audiologist online resource](#).