

Hospitalization Communication Guide for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

Going to the hospital on any day can be stressful. Communicating in a fast paced environment when we don't feel well can be challenging. In normal times, hospitals must give services that help you understand what is being said and are supposed to ask you what services you need. Examples of this might include in-person sign language interpreters, Video Remote Interpreting (VRI), lip-reading, written communications, hand-held amplification devices, captioning or CART, or communication apps.

Going to the hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic will be very different. Take time now to consider what you will need to take with you if you go to the hospital and how you will communicate with doctors, nurses and other health care staff. This guide is intended to help individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing get ready for a hospital visit.

Currently, many hospitals are seeing a large number of patients and often cannot provide the same services you normally expect. Many hospitals will not allow in-person interpreters, family members, or visitors to come into the hospital. You may be alone for a long time when you are in the hospital. Doctors and nurses in hospitals wear masks and gloves and may talk to you from behind a window or curtain, so it may be harder for you to understand them.

Below are some helpful ideas to help you prepare.

Put together an emergency bag with items you need to communicate. Label the bag and items with your name. Leave space on the label to add your hospital room number. The emergency bag might include:

- Paper and pens or markers
- Plugs and chargers for your smartphone
- Tablets and/or laptops and chargers
- A cellular hotspot in case the hospital does not have Wi-Fi or it is not working well.
- An extension cord or power strip in case your bed is far from an outlet
- Extra eyewear supplies you might need, such as reading glasses to read the speech to text on a phone app
- Extra batteries for your assistive devices
- A copy of your advance medical directive, if you have one. You can find more information and instructions to make an advance directive on [AARP's website](#)
- Emergency contact information for family members or friends

Disinfect your devices and related items, they can transmit viruses and bacteria. There are valid infection control issues for why a hospital might not let you bring a device, tablet or cell phone into an ICU or other medical environment. Devices, however, can be effectively disinfected

without damage to the device. Explore this video [How to Clean Your Smart Phone and Tablet](#) or ask the hospital infection control officer or specialist for help, if needed.

Document your need for alternative communication. Print out a page saying you are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or DeafBlind and need hospital staff to communicate with you differently. [A sample page \(placard\) is found on this page.](#)

Some hospitals offer services such as [CyraCom](#), a live language interpreter that offers ASL.

If you have a smartphone, load any apps you need to communicate, and be sure to bring it with you.

Keep in mind you might have to use a cellular connection with your phone since the hospital may not have Wi-Fi. When you get to the hospital, ask the staff if you can access Wi-Fi and if they can put you in an area where it is strong.

Ask hospital staff to communicate with you through the best method possible (i.e. through apps on your phone, via other assistive technology or, at a minimum, through the use of pen and paper.

If the hospital staff refuses to talk with you or respect your wishes, ask for an “ethics consultation.”

If you have a service animal, you may need to decide if it is essential and speak with the hospital about allowing it to remain with you.

It is likely that if you are admitted you will be alone and will not have anyone with you who understands your communication needs. Preparing now is important! Information on this page is designed to help you prepare.

Also, the Oregon Assistive Technology Staff are available to answer your questions about being prepared for a hospitalization. You can contact us via phone at 800-677-7512 or email at info@accesstechnologiesinc.org.