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You can't expect people who rely on lip reading to communicate with people wearing a mask

Face masks can reduce the clarity of speech and lower the volume between five and 15 decibels. Speech is not only quieter when wearing a mask, but also more muffled. And mask straps also interfere with hearing aids, which sit behind the ear.

Care for Kids' Ears: strong hearing, strong start

The Care for Kids' Ears – Strong hearing, strong start video features teachers, parents and health care workers talk about the importance of ear health and getting regular ear checks.



Are hearing problems associated with multiple sclerosis?

MS affects the central nervous system and can result in a wide range of symptoms throughout the body. In some cases, MS may cause hearing problems or other issues relating to the function of the ears.

The world has taken on telepractice

A study to discover trends in teleaudiology resulting from experiences of COVID-19 and developing guidelines for hearing health care practitioners and hearing services providers.



Fiona learnt the meaning of discrimination at age 10

I used to be really fearful about losing more of my hearing in the future. But learning Auslan, meeting other deaf colleagues and entering this community has given me so much relief.

One in Six of us lives with deafness or ear disorders. Hearing impairment is the most common disability of adulthood.

Our mission is to *Make ear and hearing health & wellbeing a National Priority in Australia*

Face masks a barrier to communication for people with hearing loss

By [James Coleman](#) writing for [RIOTACT](#)



Lip reading is impossible with a face mask in place. Photo: Canberra Health Services.

Communication can be a challenge for the deaf and hearing-impaired, and the mandatory wearing of face masks during COVID-19 has only made it more so.

People with hearing loss rely on facial expressions and clear speech when interacting with others, and a patch of cloth across the mouth of a speaker robs them of this ability.

Depending on the type of face mask, studies have shown they can reduce the clarity of speech and lower the volume between five and 15 decibels. Speech is not only quieter when wearing a mask, but also more muffled.

The mask straps also interfere with devices such as hearing aids, which sit behind the user's ears.

Add social distancing requirements, and [ACT Deafness Resource Centre](#) CEO Glenn Vermeulen says the deaf and hearing-impaired community face another layer of difficulty when coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's an issue that came up when governments were suggesting the use of face masks," he says.

"At the time, advocacy groups such as the [Deafness Forum of Australia](#) stood up and said, 'Look,

you can't expect people who rely on lip reading to communicate with people wearing a mask'."

It was an exception that had to be made, and in the mask mandates that followed in the Australian states and territories, governments have made sure to include communication with the deaf and hearing-impaired as a valid excuse to remove a face mask.



The ACT Deafness Resource Centre team helps people with hearing needs. Vern Meijers, Glenn Vermeulen (CEO), Joe Symons, Mark Parkinson. Photo by Thomas Lucraft.

The rules state: "You can take off your face mask when you need to communicate with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, and seeing the mouth is essential. It is important to keep 1.5 metres apart, where practicable".

Glenn says the trouble was that "hardly anyone knew about it and many people were therefore reluctant to remove their masks".

Other solutions have emerged such as a plastic shield that fits over the head and covers the face, or a conventional face mask but with a clear sheet of plastic over the mouth.

"You have to take the good with the bad," says Glenn.

"Yes, it means others can still feel secure wearing the mask, and the hearing-impaired person can lip-read, but they still can't hear very well. The plastic distorts the voice."

There is also the option of designing a custom mask that includes a slogan to alert others that you are hearing-impaired, but some people might consider that a breach of privacy or dislike the label.



Are hearing problems associated with multiple sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a progressive condition affecting the central nervous system. It can result in a wide range of symptoms throughout the body. In some cases, MS may cause hearing problems or other issues relating to the function of the ears.

MS is a chronic condition affecting the central nervous system. Evidence suggests that it is an autoimmune disorder, meaning the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. In the case of MS, the immune system attacks the protective linings of the nerves, called myelin. The results can disrupt how the brain sends signals to the body.

The course of MS is unpredictable and can cause a variety of symptoms in different people. It may cause hearing problems and other symptoms that have to do with the function of the inner ear, such as hearing loss, tinnitus, balance problems, and a muffled or full feeling in the ear.



Mark Hunt/Getty Images

Can MS cause hearing problems?

MS is not completely predictable. The course of the disease can vary greatly from one person to the next and can lead to a wide range of symptoms in different people. MS affecting different areas of the CNS may result in the specific symptoms in each case.

Hearing problems are an uncommon but possible complication of MS, occurring in roughly 6% of people with MS. They may result from damage to the hearing nerve pathways present in the brain and brainstem.

Hearing difficulties may occur as part of an exacerbation of the condition. This refers to when old symptoms get worse or new ones develop. Hearing problems can be a short-term symptom in some cases, but some people may experience longer lasting changes to their hearing.

MS and sensorineural hearing loss

Sensorineural hearing loss (SNHL) is a type of hearing loss that can occur after damage to the nerve pathways of the inner ear. While hearing loss is not a common symptom of MS, evidence notes that SNHL in the MS population far exceeds that in the general population.

It can make softer sounds hard to hear and may cause louder sounds to be unclear or sound muffled. This may make it difficult for a person to understand words against background noises.

SNHL may follow a progressive or fluctuating pattern in people with MS. A [2018 systematic review](#) notes that it is more common in the early stages of the disease and may come on suddenly. But it may also occur progressively as the disease itself progresses.

MS and sudden hearing loss

[Sudden sensorineural hearing loss](#) is a rapid impairment of hearing. A person may lose a noticeable amount of hearing all at once or over a few days. Medically, this includes a loss of 30 decibels or more of hearing capabilities. For comparison, this would make whispers very hard to hear, or inaudible, and make normal conversations sound about the same as whispers.

This type of hearing loss does not often have an identifiable cause, but typically occurs due to an underlying condition that damages the nerves or sensory organs of the inner ear.

A 2016 study notes that sudden hearing loss is rare in MS, occurring in [3%](#) of cases at most. Sudden hearing loss may appear both in the early stages of the disease or in later stages as the disease progresses. In some rare cases, it may be the [first symptom](#) a person experiences.

MS and hearing loss in one ear

[Research](#) suggests that sudden hearing loss in MS is commonly unilateral, meaning it occurs in one ear rather than both.

A [2021 review](#) adds that sudden hearing loss in one ear is also the most common presenting symptom involving the ear in MS. But in some cases it may occur in both ears.

Hearing loss may also begin in one ear and then later affect the other ear.

MS and tinnitus

Tinnitus is a relatively common symptom with a number of potential causes. Aging ears, exposure to loud noise.

Evidence suggests that tinnitus occurs in about 1% of MS cases. Tinnitus due to MS may occur due to damage of the nerves controlling the ear.

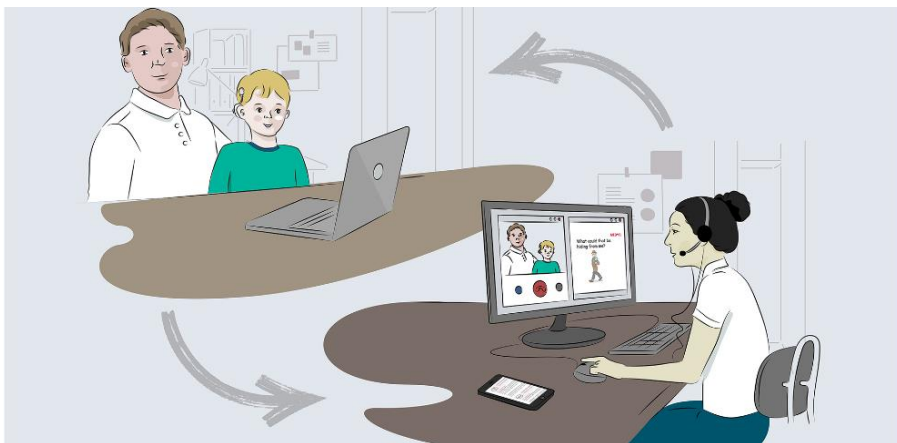
Treatments

If sudden hearing symptoms occur in someone with known MS, a doctor may prescribe and administer corticosteroids. The [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#) in the U.S. notes that a doctor may administer steroids as soon as possible and may suggest them before test results return confirming a diagnosis.

Quickly administering corticosteroids may be effective at controlling damage and increasing the likelihood of recovering hearing. Delaying treatment will likely decrease the effectiveness of treatments.

From [Medical News Today](#)

The World has taken on Telepractice



The World Health Organization has produced a review of literature highlighting changes brought about by COVID 19.

Therapy services to families with children using hearing technology were researched by MED-EL in the first half of last year. The research documented a rapid increase in telepractice and identified factors and resources that helped professionals become more confident in delivering telepractice. Read more here: [World Health Organization. Aural Rehabilitation via Telepractice During COVID 19](#)

In this study MED-EL shared made-for-telepractice resources with professionals around the world and these are now freely available. [MED-EL Remote Lesson Kits](#). While designed for use by professionals in telepractice, the resources are suitable for at home practice. In addition, MED-EL have 26 original Lesson Kits available for free download: [Find all 26 MED-EL Lesson Kits here](#)

MED-EL is planning a follow up study to be launched next month. The objective of this next study is to discover trends in telepractice resulting from experience over the 20 months of COVID 19 and identify any changes to pre-COVID practices. Clinicians will again be provided with early access to a custom made telepractice resource with additional information on key teaching strategies and parent coaching behaviours. Professionals wishing to express interest in joining this study can register here: [EOI Global Trends in Aural Rehabilitation](#).

Telepractice intervention is not just for children. Rehabilitation sessions for adults can be provided via telepractice with NDIS support for those eligible. For those wanting resources to work on developing listening skills for adults, MED-EL have free auditory rehabilitation kits. You can find 6 free kits here: [Adult Rehabilitation Kits](#) and more are coming.



Care for Kids' Ears – strong hearing, strong start

The Care for Kids' Ears – Strong hearing, strong start video features teachers, parents and health care workers talk about the importance of ear health and getting regular ear checks.



The [video is here](#)

It is also available [with an Auslan interpreter](#)

[Care for Kids' Ears – Order resources](#)



"I like having the choice of how I receive my hearing care – in-person for some services and using email or my caption video phone for others."

*Ian Rimes, Consumer
Teleaudiology Guidelines Working Group Member*

Be a part of the conversation



#TeleaudiologyGuidelines

Teleaudiology practice guidelines

We've seen more people using teleaudiology during the pandemic but what might be the options for teleaudiology best practice in the future?

Teleaudiology can enable individuals and their families to exercise choice and control about how they receive hearing services.

Audiology Australia is developing teleaudiology guidelines for hearing health care practitioners and hearing services providers.

Audiology Australia is seeking your feedback to help shape these guidelines.

Visit www.teleaudiologyguidelines.org.au to submit written comments or to register for a focus group.

Deafness Forum is a member of this working group.



Arts Centre Melbourne announce a new arts disability festival

Arts Centre Melbourne and Arts Access Victoria are excited to announce Alter State, a major arts and disability festival.

Alter State will open with a launch event week this November and build to the main festival in 2022. There will be live performances, talks and workshops celebrating contemporary disability arts in Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Wendy O'Neill, Arts Centre Melbourne's Creative Producer, Access & Inclusion and Alter State co-lead says, "Alter State is more than a presentation of amazing art; it is a two-year journey of artists exploring creativity shaped by our geographic location and histories, telling stories from our region and delving into new approaches to Access in a program that we hope will seed and imagine diverse futures."

Caroline Bowditch, CEO of Arts Access Victoria and Alter State co-lead says: "It has been many years since we have had a major cross art form event platforming the work of Deaf and Disabled artists in Victoria. We have seen incredible examples in other states and other parts of the world but to have that in our backyard again feels significant.

The sector and the community have been missing the opportunity to come together, share different stories and wisdom, and showcase the incredible talent and experience that Deaf and Disabled artists can bring.

In November 2021, Alter State will launch.

The opening event will include two commissions – one in collaboration with the Metro Tunnel Creative Program and the other, a collaboration between the British Council and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Further details regarding this event will be announced in early September 2021.

For more information click [HERE](#) Photo Credit: Tom Hoyle

Empowering clients and raising standards

This is an interview by the Ida Institute (Denmark) with the chief executive of Audiology Australia, the country's biggest professional community for audiologists.

CEO Tony Coles talks hearing loss prevention, empowered clients, and new standards in audiology.



Question: How do you and your organization work towards making hearing care more person-centered?

Audiology Australia is the peak professional body for audiologists in Australia. With more than 3,000 members, we provide accreditation for audiologists to ensure the highest possible standards of practice and client care.

As part of our accreditation program, all members are required to have read, acknowledged and agreed to abide by our Code of Conduct, which includes audiologists being required to put the needs of clients first and foremost in all clinical decisions, and involve clients in the decision-making processes.

Question: What three words would you use to describe your organization?

Peak. Professional. Progressive.

Question: Tell us about a project you're working on that excites you.

Audiology Australia is currently working on National Competency Standards and Paediatric Competency Standards for the Australian profession of audiology.

Developed with feedback from audiologists and clients alike, these standards will seek to outline the expected minimum competencies of audiologists – providing greater assurance and understanding for clients when they consult an audiologist.

The process involves working with audiologists and consumers to develop standards, including a need for audiologists to provide client and family-centred care and only provide hearing services that are clinically justified or in the best interests of the client.

These standards will enhance the ability of audiologists to work with their clients and empower clients as to what they can expect when engaging their audiologist.

Question: Why did your organisation join the person-centred Hearing Network?

Audiology Australia's interest in person-centred hearing care is vital in delivering advocacy, resources, professional development, and tools for our members to best support their clients, including involving clients (and their families) in the decision-making process regarding their hearing health.

The more we can facilitate the provision of information to members, the more options they have in delivering the best possible support to those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Question: What do you see as the greatest challenges and opportunities for hearing care in the next decade?

One of the greatest challenges for hearing healthcare is the significant numbers of people who may lose their hearing, especially noise-induced hearing loss. Preventing hearing loss is critical, and providing accessible hearing healthcare options for the public, provided by qualified audiologists, will continue to be a key focus for Audiology Australia over the next decade.

Embracing technology, advocating for good public policy, ensuring flexible and practical models of funding, and working with the needs of clients will help overcome and meet some of these challenges.

Question: In one sentence, what is your ideal vision of hearing care in the future?

We believe every person has the right to communicate and interact with the world in ways that are fulfilling and meaningful to them.



The [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#) has been extended to September 2023.

Counselling and advocacy supports are available for people with disability and their families, carers and support workers who are engaging with or impacted by the Disability Royal Commission.

Communications products are available on the [Disability Royal Commission supports webpage](#).

The following accessible products are available on the [Disability Royal Commission supports webpage](#). You are welcome to print these products internally and distribute them in your community.

[Fact sheets, posters and Easy Reads](#)

[In-language factsheets \(available in 13 languages\)](#)

[Fact sheets and posters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#)

Fiona hopes for new way of viewing deafness



Fiona Graney learnt the word 'discrimination' at the age of 10.

'We were playing tee-ball and one of my classmates said, "I don't want her on my team, she can't hear on the field". I was very upset and told my dad. He said "You tell them that's discrimination!" I remember thinking, what does that mean?

Fast forward 24 years, with a law degree behind her, Fiona is now reviewing the Disability Discrimination Act at the Royal Commission.

Fiona has noticed a shift in her own attitudes towards deafness and disability.

'I became severely deaf after contracting meningoencephalitis as a baby and always referred to myself as hearing impaired. But since joining the Royal Commission, I've learnt that the term can be offensive to the Deaf community because it focuses on deafness as a deficit,' she said.

Fiona said she's been exposed to a 'whole new world' and approach to deafness. One that values deafness, promotes Auslan, and fosters a positive identity and culture in deaf people.

'It's also introduced me to a new vocabulary; words like 'Deaf pride', 'Deafhood' and 'Deaf gain' (as opposed to just 'hearing loss').

'For instance, I used to be really fearful about losing more of my hearing in the future. But learning Auslan, meeting other deaf colleagues and entering this community has given me so much relief.'

Fiona hopes that in the same way her attitudes have changed, so too will society's.

'There's still a lot of fear and stigma around disability, particularly deafness. The words deaf and blind are commonly used in a very negative way by politicians and in the media,' she said.

'I really hope that into the future there will be greater education and awareness about disability and terminology. I hope people will start to view disability differently and recognise when the terms they are using may not be helpful to people with disability.'

Source: Disability Royal Commission 'Connect' newsletter, www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au

Become a member of Deafness Forum

An individual member of Deafness Forum of Australia can be person who has a hearing impairment, is Deaf, a member of their family, or someone who provides services such as teachers, researchers, audiologists, etc.

New memberships for people under 26 years or a parent or guardian are free for the first calendar year. To join, download and complete a membership [application form](#)

An organisation member can be a consumer association – an organisation that is of or for consumers – or a service provider association, which provides services that support people with hearing loss, who are Deaf or who have a balance or ear disorder.

Annual membership fees for organisations start at \$100. Download a membership [application form](#)

More info at <https://www.deafnessforum.org.au/about-us/become-a-member/>



www.austdeafgames.org.au

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community: we pay respect to them and their cultures, to elders past, present and future. We want to be part of the effort to overcome the unacceptably high levels of ear health issues among First Nation people; and we understand that it is an essential component of Closing the Gap. We understand the risk to indigenous sign languages and the cultural loss it would cause.

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