



# Interacting with Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

For health departments, clinics, and other providers

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing must be provided access to effective and appropriate **virtual or in-person sign language interpretation and textual English communication.**

## Methods of communication

Become familiar with multiple communication methods in the event that certain services are inaccessible or delayed during general operations.

- In-person sign language interpreters
- Speech-to-text apps (may not be accessible in some environments)
- Captioning or communication access real time translation (CART)
- Written communications (only for brief or simple communication)
- Video remote interpreting (VRI)
- Lip reading (not often a reliable form of communication)

## Communicating with people who do not use sign language

- If communication is difficult, try writing down a few words and phrases.
- Use a computer or other device as a communication tool.
- Let the individual speak. If they do not understand you, type and allow the person to see the screen.

## Communicating with people who use sign language

- When working with an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is Deaf.
- Make sure the person who is Deaf has a clear line of vision to the interpreter.
- Use gestures, facial expressions, and body language to assist with communication.

## Technology aids

- Individuals may arrive with their own device for technology-based communication.
- Make sure individuals with these devices have access to Wi-Fi connectivity and an outlet to charge their device.
- Local health departments, clinics, and other public health providers may provide devices with pre-downloaded communication applications.
- **Remember:** Not all technology aids are appropriate or suitable for all situations.



## Written communication

- Print legibly.
- Keep instructions simple. Use present tense and basic vocabulary.
- If the individual understands you well, use more complex language. Take your cue from the individual.
- **Remember:** Not all individuals will be able to read English well enough to understand written instructions.



## General communication tips

- Ask what form of communication works best.
- Choose a quiet environment when possible.
- Make sure you have the individual's attention before speaking.
- Do not cover your mouth when speaking.
- Look directly at the individual you are speaking to and maintain eye contact.
- Speak naturally and with a normal expression.
- Do not shout. A person who is Deaf will not hear you, no matter how loud you speak.
- Be patient and take time to communicate.
- Remember that hearing loss is not the same as loss of intelligence.
- State the topic of conversation as you begin.

## Additional resources

- Sign language technical assistance: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02242.pdf>
- Video remote interpreting technical assistance: <https://rid.org/about/resources/#ssp> (pages 5–7, medical settings)
- Communication access real-time translation technical assistance: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02975.pdf>
- Emergency preparedness toolkit visual communication tool: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/cpd/visual-comm-tool.pdf>

