COVID-19 guidance with regard to supporting Deaf people

The introduction of mandatory face masks in most enclosed spaces across Britain was designed to protect people during the pandemic but has made life very difficult for the deaf community.

Face coverings prevent lip reading and hide facial expressions, making it virtually impossible for the 12 million people who are either deaf or suffering with hearing loss in Britain to communicate and forcing many to stay at home.

Face covering exemptions

Those travelling with, or providing help to deaf people are exempt from wearing face coverings under the rules. This includes BSL interpreters.

Government guidance says you do not need to wear a face covering if you have a legitimate reason not to – for example, due to, health, age or equality reasons.

You do not need to wear a face covering if you are unable to put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability.

If you find you cannot wear your hearing aids or cochlear implant processor securely with a face covering, or if wearing a face covering interferes with your hearing aids or cochlear implant processor, this counts as a legitimate reason for not wearing one.

If you are communicating with someone who relies on facial expressions or lipreading

"If you are travelling with, or providing assistance to, someone who relies on lipreading or facial expressions to communicate, you are not required by law to wear a face covering."

You will not be acting illegally or face a penalty if you remove your face covering to communicate with someone who is deaf or has hearing loss and needs to see your face to communicate with you. You may want to maintain social distance while doing so.

BSL interpreters may choose to lower their masks during interpreting in order to enable smooth communication.

Facemasks with clear panelled fronts are becoming more widely available and would be useful to keep in supply for staff working face to face with customers.