

Messages for people with disabilities



Covid-19

VSO has developed this paper as a tool to be used for people with disabilities amidst the COVID-19 response. The messages are developed specifically for blind people, deaf people, people with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities and for personal assistants and caregivers.

This will come in handy for VSO interventions intended to build awareness on the prevention of and protection against the novel coronavirus. The prevention and protection safety tips are adapted from the World Health Organisation and centres for disease control and prevention and contextualised to the requirements of those with disabilities.

These guidelines have been developed by Praveen Kumar, social inclusion lead adviser at VSO, with input from people with disabilities.

All COVID-19 guidelines applicable for non-disabled people also apply to those with disabilities, however there are areas that need specific attention and consideration, particularly considering that those with disabilities often depend on others for support and assistance.

Ensure the messages are communicated to people with disabilities in the relevant format as required:

- **Blind people:** Provide audio versions of messages, or e-text for those who use screen readers on mobile phones or laptops, and braille for those who use Braille.
- **Deaf people:** Communication should be in sign language and through observing lip reading.
- **Intellectually disabled:** Work with guardians or caregivers, and use slow speech when interacting with the person.

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1) Messages for Blind people

1. Washing hands more frequently

As you use your hands more frequently, you should wash them more. Hands should be sanitised or washed with soap frequently for at least 20 seconds.

Avoid touching your face with unwashed or non-sanitised hands. Keep a bottle of sanitiser or hand wash handy. Ensure the sanitiser has more than 60% alcohol content. Wash hands once every two hours. Rinsing of hands should also include the back of the palm, the tips of all fingers, the thumbs and up to the wrist. Scrubbing of fingers and nails is also important.

2. Safe touching

Blind people cannot avoid being tactile as touch is the main means of communication. Use tissues or a handkerchief when touching railings, the inside walls of an elevator, hand grips on buses and trains.

Ensure you wash the handkerchief frequently and dry it in the sun immediately. Surrounding your house, clean the hand grips and other necessary spots that you're likely to touch with a tissue (keep a box of tissues in your bag with the hand sanitiser) before touching them. Otherwise, thoroughly clean your hands with sanitiser or soap.

Ensure your assistant/partner/family members are also using the safety precautions including washing hands for 20 seconds and using sanitisers and masks.

3. Use of masks:

Use of masks is advisable when going out in public. Cover your mouth and nose with a mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask. This is most important if you are coughing, sneezing or have a runny nose as there may be other people around you. Frequently changing masks and disposing of them properly is necessary.

Each mask should be put on and removed in such a way that it does not touch other parts of your body. Ensure you throw away the dampened mask and do not re-use single-use masks.

Combine mask use with frequent hand-cleaning

(soap and water and alcohol-based hand rub) to ensure mask use is effective.

4. Close your mouth when coughing.

Sneeze into the tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately.

5. Sanitising your assistive devices and personal equipment

Assistive devices that you are using, such as spectacles or a white cane, should be cleaned before and after every use. Find a clean place to keep your devices when not in use. Always clean items before entering your house after returning from outside.

Along with this, it's important to clean your personal equipment like mobile phones, laptops and so on frequently. It is recommended to keep use of devices personal at this time.

Sanitise door knobs, railings, bars and handles in the house frequently.

6. Self-isolation

In the instance self-quarantine is required, it may be difficult for you to be in total isolation. The best thing you can do is minimise physical contact with other people. It is better to reschedule your routine, consider home quarantine and make precise timings for coming in contact with your personal assistant or other family members for daily tasks. Avoid taking assistance from more than one person in these times.

Keep yourself away from children or elders in the house. If you have children avoid touching their face. Ensure other members in your house wash their hands frequently with you. Wash your hands and the hands of the child after playing with toys. Sanitising is a must for you and your personal assistant before and after coming in physical contact.

Make sure the person assisting you has taken necessary safety precautions.

7. Using assistants and guides

At this time it is important to avoid the use of assistants and guides, however if, in the situation an assistant or guide is absolutely essential, then ensure the assistant and guide is also following safety precautions including hand washing, using hand sanitiser and wearing a mask. Use of a

mask is important for both people. There is no harm in the sighted guide technique where you hold the elbow of the guiding person as you are not touching the palm and hands of the person. However, it is preferred at this time to hold the shoulder or upper arm of the guide. Ensure both of you are wearing the mask and you wash your hands immediately after the guiding session ends.

Do not let the guide lead you by holding the white cane.

8. Safe food

Home cooked food, cooked by yourself, is best. If you are not cooking for yourself then it is important to ensure the person serving the food is following hygiene precautions. Also ensure you wash hands before eating. Ensure you wash and clean the box of groceries and packets which you purchase. Orient and train the caregiver or those serving food to wash hands and maintain hygiene.

9. Prepare your support system

- Keep important contacts handy. Make your assistant aware of this contact list. Memorise phone numbers of helplines, hospitals, ambulance services and other services. Write them in braille if necessary.
- Be in touch with close friends, family, and relatives who you can call in times of emergency.
- Be in touch with local organisations, government bodies and associations working with blind people.
- Keep alternatives for your assistance ready.
- Ensure you purchase and store enough medicine for yourself in case you can't access medicine from shops at a later date.

2) Messages for Deaf people

Ensure these messages are conveyed in an accessible format i.e. sign language.

1. Washing hands more frequently

As you use your hands more frequently, you should wash them more. Hands should be sanitised or washed with soap frequently for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your face with unwashed or non-sanitised hands. Keep a bottle of sanitiser or hand wash handy. Ensure the sanitiser has more than 60% alcohol content. Wash hands once every two hours.

Rinsing of hands should also include the back of the palm, the tips of all fingers, the thumbs and up to the wrist. Scrubbing of fingers and nails is also important.

If you do not have access to flowing water, fill up a bottle with water and add soap to it and shake it to mix. By just using a few drops you will not need to use as much water to wash your hands.

If you are working at a counter or front desk it is important again to use hand sanitiser frequently.

2. Use of masks

Use of masks is advisable when going out in public. Cover your mouth and nose with a mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask. This is most important if you are coughing, sneezing or have a runny nose as there may be other people around you. Frequently changing masks and disposing of them properly is necessary. Each mask should be put on and removed in such a way that it does not touch other parts of your body. Ensure you throw away the dampened mask and do not re-use single-use masks.

Combine mask use with frequent hand-cleaning (soap and water and alcohol-based hand rub) to ensure mask use is effective.

3. Close your mouth when coughing.

Sneeze into the tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately.

4. Sanitising your hearing aid

Assistive devices that you are using such as a hearing aid or hearing pin should be cleaned after and before every use. Ensure you do not use water on the hearing aid and hearing pin as they are battery operated. Fix a clean place to keep your devices when not in use.

Always clean it before entering your house after returning from outside.

It's important to clean your personal equipment like mobile phones, laptops and so on frequently. It is recommended to keep use of devices personal at this time.

Sanitise door knobs, railings, hand bars and handles in the house frequently.

5. Self-isolation

You may need to quarantine yourself during this time. While it may be difficult for deaf people

to be in total isolation, often the best thing to do is to minimise physical contact. It is better to reschedule your routine considering home quarantine and make specific timings for coming in contact with other family members for daily tasks. Join WhatsApp groups and networks of deaf people for enhancing social communication. Keep yourself away from children or elders in the house. If you have children, avoid touching their face. Ensure other members in your house wash their hands frequently with you. Wash your hands and the hands of the child after playing with toys.

6. Safe Food

Home cooked food, cooked by yourself, is best. If you are not cooking for yourself then it is important to ensure the person serving the food is following hygiene precautions. Also ensure you wash hands before eating. Ensure you wash and clean the box of groceries and packets which you purchase. Orient and train the caregiver or those serving food to wash hands and maintain hygiene.

7. Prepare your support system

- Keep important contacts handy. Memorise phone numbers of helplines, hospitals, ambulance services and other services.
- Be in touch with close friends, family, and relatives who you can text or WhatsApp in times of emergency.
- Be in touch with local organisations, government bodies and associations working for deaf people.
- Ensure you purchase and store enough medicine for yourself in case you can't access medicine from shops at a later date.

3) Messages for People with Physical Disability

1. Washing hands more frequently

As you use your hands more frequently, you should wash them more. Hands should be sanitised or washed with soap frequently for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your face with unwashed or non-sanitised hands. Keep a bottle of sanitiser or hand wash handy. Ensure the sanitiser has more than 60% alcohol content. Wash hands once every two hours. Rinsing of hands should also include the back of the palm, the tips of all fingers, the thumbs and up to the wrist. Scrubbing of fingers and nails is also important.

If you do not have access to flowing water, fill up a bottle with water and add soap to it and shake it to mix. By just using a few drops you will not need to use as much water to wash your hands.

2. Use of masks:

Use of masks is advisable when going out in public. Cover your mouth and nose with a mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask. This is most important if you are coughing, sneezing or have a runny nose as there may be other people around you. Frequently changing masks and disposing of them properly is necessary. Each mask should be put on and removed in such a way that it does not touch other parts of your body. Ensure you throw away the dampened mask and do not re-use single-use masks.

Combine mask use with frequent hand-cleaning (soap and water and alcohol-based hand rub) to ensure mask use is effective.

3. Close your mouth when coughing.

Sneeze into the tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately.

4. Sanitising your assistive devices and personal equipment

All the devices that you use such as a wheelchair, crutches, spectacles etc. which you or your assistant touch for operating/support should be cleaned before and after every use. Find a clean place to keep your devices when not in use.

Always clean devices before entering your house after returning from outside.

Along with this, it's important to clean your personal equipment like mobile phones, laptops and so on frequently. It is recommended to keep use of devices personal at this time.

Sanitise door knobs, railings, hand bars and handles in the house frequently.

5. Self-isolation

Some people may need to self-quarantine. While it may be difficult for people with physical disabilities to be in total isolation, the best thing one can do is to minimise physical contact. It is better to reschedule your routine, considering home quarantine, and arrange specific timings for coming in contact with personal assistants or other family members for daily tasks.

Avoid taking assistance from more than one person in these times. Keep yourself away from children or elders in the house. If you have children avoid touching their face. Ensure other members in your house wash their hands frequently. Wash your hands and the hands of the child after playing with toys. Sanitising is a must for you and your personal assistant before and after coming in physical contact. Make sure the person assisting you has taken necessary precautions of safety.

6. Safe touching

Though it might be near possible to avoid all touch, you can reduce the frequency of touching others and take extra care when coming into physical contact with anyone, including your personal assistants. Ensure the caregiver is also taking safety precautions including washing hands, using sanitisers and masks. Use of masks is important for both people.

7. Avoid touching railings, handles or other supportive public grips

In extreme conditions, where there is no other option and you need to go out, use tissues and handkerchiefs when touching the railings of public stairs, lift buttons, doors, handles of public transport etc.

Make sure you dispose of the tissue and wash the handkerchief, letting it dry in the sun, immediately after use.

8. Stock up necessities

Avoid going out as much as possible. It's wise to encourage assistants to stock up on all necessities like medicines and groceries, or use online delivery services if available in the area.

9. Safe food

Home cooked food, cooked by yourself, is best. If you are not cooking for yourself then it is important to ensure the person serving the food is following hygiene precautions. Also ensure you wash hands before eating. Ensure you wash and clean the box of groceries and packets which you purchase. Orient and train the caregiver or those serving food to wash hands and maintain hygiene.

10. Keep yourself and your surroundings clean

Keep yourself, your devices, equipment, and home environment cleaner during this time.

Frequently change bedding and chair covers and keep these things more personal.

11. Exercise

People with physical disabilities who are recommended to exercise should be more careful in these times. This is especially important for people with breathing difficulties or lung problems. Consult your doctor immediately if you have any difficulties breathing.

12. Prepare your support system

- Keep important contacts handy. Make your assistant or caregiver aware of this contact list. Memorise phone numbers of helplines, ambulance services, hospitals and other services. Keep in touch with close friends, family, and relatives who you can call in times of emergency.
- Be in touch with local organisations, governments bodies and associations working with people with physical disabilities.
- Find potential alternatives to your current assistants and caregivers.
- Ensure access to medications and stock up medications required over a longer period.

Ensure these messages are conveyed by speech to people with intellectually disabilities, along with their caregivers and/or guardians.

4) Messages for people with intellectual disabilities

1. Washing hands more frequently

As you use your hands more frequently, you should wash them more. Hands should be sanitised or washed with soap frequently for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your face with unwashed or non-sanitised hands. Keep a bottle of sanitiser or hand wash handy. Ensure the sanitiser has more than 60% alcohol content. Wash hands once every two hours. Rinsing of hands should also include the back of the palm, the tips of all fingers, the thumbs and up to the wrist. Scrubbing of fingers and nails is also important.

If you do not have access to flowing water, fill up a bottle with water and add soap to it and shake it to mix. By just using a few drops you will not need to use as much water to wash your hands.

2. Use of masks:

Use of masks is advisable when going out in public. Cover your mouth and nose with a mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask. This is most important if you are coughing, sneezing or have a runny nose as there may be other people around you. Frequently changing masks and disposing of them properly is necessary. Each mask should be put on and removed in such a way that it does not touch other parts of your body. Ensure you throw away the dampened mask and do not re-use single-use masks.

Combine mask use with frequent hand-cleaning (soap and water and alcohol-based hand rub) to ensure mask use is effective.

3. Close your mouth when coughing.

Sneeze into the tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately.

4. Clean your personal equipment

Equipment like therapy aids, learning materials, mobiles and laptops should be cleaned before and after every use.

5. Self-isolation

If self-quarantine is necessary, it can be difficult for people with autism, Down syndrome and depression to be in total isolation. Ensure that you minimise physical contact with other people. It is better to reschedule your routine, considering home quarantine, and arrange specific timings for coming in contact with your personal assistants or other family members for daily tasks. Avoid taking assistance from more than one person in these times. Keep yourself away from children or elders in the house. If you have children avoid touching their face. Ensure other members in your house wash their hands frequently with you.

6. Safe food

Home cooked food, cooked by yourself, is best. If you are not cooking for yourself then it is important to ensure the person serving the food is following hygiene precautions. Also ensure you wash hands before eating. Ensure you wash and clean the box of groceries and packets which you purchase. Orient and train the caregiver or those serving food to wash hands and maintain hygiene.

Prepare your support system

- Keep important contacts handy. Write them on a piece of paper and keep it with you all the time. Key numbers of helplines, hospitals, ambulance services and other services is important.
- Stay in touch with close friends, family, and relatives who you can reach out to for help.
- Ask your relatives and friends to call frequently.
- Be in touch with local organisations, government bodies and associations working for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Ensure you purchase and store enough medicine for yourself in case you can't access medicine from shops at a later date.

Note for caregivers and guardians for people with intellectual disabilities

A. It is important to monitor the anxiety and behaviour of intellectually disabled people as they are prone to diverse behaviour patterns in isolation.

B. Those with an intellectual disability can become more aggressive and/or more withdrawn at this time.

C. Ensure you are in frequent contact with the individual's doctor for advice.

D. Ensure you also keep the necessary emergency contacts and medications in reach of people with intellectual disabilities wherever possible.

E. People going through psychosocial treatment and care must not be kept in isolation and therefore close monitoring is important.

F. Ensure access to medications and stock up on medications required over a long period.

5) Messages for caregivers

People with disabilities are more vulnerable to the COVID-19 infection due to their needs, like more frequent touching to carry out day-to-day activities. Therefore, the scope of your support also needs to be widened at this critical time. You need to be more careful and alert due to the high possibility of transmission between caregiver and receiver. Keep in mind the possibility that health facilities may be denied to people with disabilities in times of scarcity, so being cautious is even more important.

1. Washing Hands

Washing your hands before and after touching people with disabilities is a must. Keeping sanitiser or a water bottle and soap handy wherever you go is necessary. Ensure the sanitiser has more than 60% alcohol content. It is recommended to wash/sanitise your hands and the hands of the person with the disability every two hours.

2. Use of masks:

Use of masks is advisable when going out in public. Cover your mouth and nose with a mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask. This is most important if you are coughing, sneezing or have a runny nose as there may be other people around you. Frequently changing masks and disposing of them properly is necessary. Each mask should be put on and removed in such a way that it does not touch other parts of your body. Ensure you throw away the dampened mask and do not re-use single-use masks.

Combine mask use with frequent hand-cleaning (soap and water and alcohol-based hand rub) to ensure mask use is effective.

3. Close your mouth when coughing.

Sneeze into the tissue and dispose of the tissue immediately.

4. Sanitising assistive devices and personal equipment

Assistive devices should be sanitised using sanitiser or soap water and clean the wet surface of the device using a clean dry cloth. Handles of devices which are frequently touched for operating the device by you or another person should be cleaned more carefully and regularly. Keep the devices in a safe place when not in use.

5. Physical distancing:

As physical distancing is not possible for you, all instructions related to going out should be followed very strictly. If you commute from your residence to the place of the care receiver every day, you are more at-risk. In this case, clean yourself first upon entering your house or your care receiver's house. Avoid touching anything before cleaning your hands. Sanitise the door handles and nobs after entering the house every time. Do not come into direct physical contact with the person with a disability immediately after coming into the house. Go straight to the basin or bathroom to clean your hands and legs.

6. Avoid touching railings, handles or other public supportive bars

While outside. Use tissues for public facilities like lifts or doors etc.. Ensure you dispose of the tissue.

7. Sneeze

Sneeze into a tissue and then dispose of that tissue immediately.

8. Safe touching

Make a proper schedule for all the activities where you need to touch the care receiver, and stick to it. Regularly clean all the things that he/she or you come in contact like electronic equipment, household devices, therapeutic aids and toys. Minimise touching the person with disability.

9. Stock up necessities

Stock up on all necessities like food and medicine. Avoid going out as much as possible. Try approaching other family members or friends to pick up things from the market. If possible, use a home delivery service.

10. Safe food

Make sure food is washed properly before cooking. All grocery containers and packets should be cleaned before using.

11. Ensure the person with the disability also maintains self-hygiene

12. Exercise

Ensure regular exercise is done as required, but be more careful, particularly if you have breathing difficulties or problems related to your lungs. Consult your doctor immediately if you notice any symptoms.

13. Support system

- Keep all the important contacts including family members, close friends, medical help, helplines, ambulance and hospitals handy. Make such adjustments so that the person with the disability can access it in your absence if needed.
- Ensure people requiring frequent blood transfusions or dialysis are catered to and are able to access the services through a local organisation or hospital.