



How to communicate better when wearing a mask

Wearing a mask and a face shield can make it very hard to understand what we say, especially for people who may have a hearing loss or cognitive impairment.

This can cause our patients to be easily confused and not understand what is happening to them.

We can't change what we need to wear to protect ourselves and our patients - but we can change what we do to support these people in our care.

Before you start to talk:

- Understand if your patient has any issues with hearing, communication or cognition.
- Make sure your patient knows you are there: a gentle arm touch or pat on the hand, announcing yourself clearly, or a big and obvious wave.
- Gain their eye contact and attention before you start talking.
- Turn off the TV and limit any visual distractions.
- Be face level and at eye-to-eye.
- Check if they have hearing aids, are wearing them and they are turned on.
- Bring in paper and a thick pen or texta, or other resources you may need to support conversation.

If someone is having trouble understanding you:

- Speak a little slower and pause between sentences.
- Don't yell or shout.
- Use gestures to reinforce what you're saying, or demonstrate what you want them to do.
- Write down key messages.
- Check your patient understands by asking them to repeat back their understanding of what has been said.
- Use assisted communicative tools as required – ask your ward speech pathologist for more information.
- Use eyes/eyebrows and other body language to emphasise points.

If a patient or colleague is having difficulty understanding you after trying all of the above suggestions, you can remove your face shield and replace with goggles to assist you. Face masks must continue to be worn at all times.