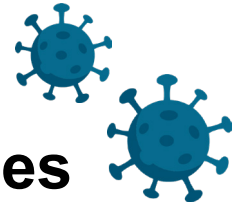


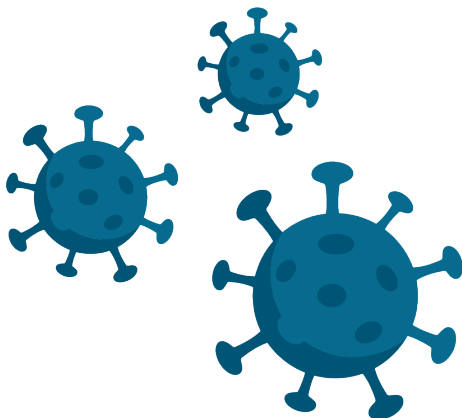


# Accessible communication during COVID-19 and other emergencies: A guideline for persons with disabilities



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## About Accessibility Standards Canada

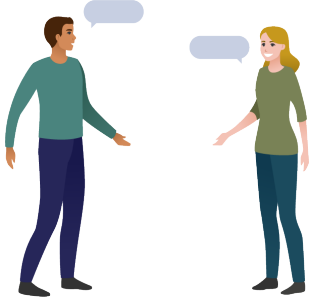
- Created under the Accessible Canada Act to:
  - develop and review accessibility standards for federally regulated organizations\*; and
  - support and promote innovative research that identifies, removes and prevents accessibility barriers.
- Accessibility is about creating inclusive communities for all. The Accessible Canada Act promotes the creation of a Canada without barriers.

**\*Federally regulated organizations:** Government of Canada departments and agencies, and private sector organizations like banks and those that operate in the federal transportation network.

## About these guidelines

- These are practical guidelines for persons with disabilities during public health crises and other emergencies.
- They address communication barriers that may exist during emergencies.
- These guidelines were created for COVID-19, but they can be used for other emergencies.
- National disability organizations and other stakeholders helped create these guidelines.
- The information is not medical or legal advice. When needed, seek advice from:
  - a public health authority; and/or
  - a legal professional.

# Getting started



- Accessible communication is a two-way process. It happens when people both give and receive information:
  - face to face;
  - over the telephone;
  - when they read and understand written information;
  - on websites and social media;
  - when they complete forms; or
  - when they sign documents.



- For a person with a disability, communication during an emergency can be more difficult. You should always let others know how you want to communicate and what is best for you.
- Taking steps today can help you be ready and more confident when communicating in an emergency, whether it is a pandemic, like COVID-19, a natural disaster, or another emergency.



- A good communication plan with a range of tools will help you be ready.
- Below are some suggestions for a communication plan that you can personalize to meet your own needs.
- These are suggestions only and may not apply to every emergency or to a person's particular needs. You should decide which elements to include in your communication plan.



## Note on preparing emergency plans and kits

- The Government of Canada provides information on how to prepare an emergency kit. An emergency kit includes items such as clothing and prescription medications. You can find more information in the [Emergency Preparedness Guide for Persons with Disabilities](#).



- If you have an assistant or caregiver, that person should also create a plan in the event that they become ill, incapacitated or separated from you during an emergency. This could include specifying the information set out below such as:
  - listing the medications, routines, and doctors of the person with a disability;
  - identifying who might be able to fill the caregiver role;
  - drafting a list of family members, friends and neighbours who can be contacted in an emergency; and
  - drafting a list of home health care agencies or long-term care facilities that can care for the person.

## Developing a communication plan for persons with disabilities

### Make a contact list and a personal information list

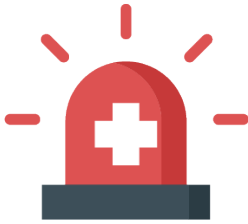


- Do not go through an emergency alone.
- Ask your family, friends, neighbours, or community resources to join your emergency support network.
- Prepare a list of all your emergency contacts.
- If needed, ask someone on your support team to create your contact and personal information lists.

### Build a personal support team



- Choose at least three people you know and trust to help you during an emergency.
- A trusted neighbour is a good team member, as they often live closest to you. For example, if you need to stay home during COVID-19, a neighbour can help you with essentials like groceries and prescriptions.
- Consider including a person who lives far enough to avoid facing the same emergency.



- Make sure that your team has a copy of your emergency contact and personal information list.
- Make sure your team is familiar with:
  - how you communicate; and
  - any assistive devices that you use.
- If an emergency happens, ask your personal support team to:
  - check on you right away; and
  - stay in touch with you, especially if you rely on life sustaining equipment or need regular care.

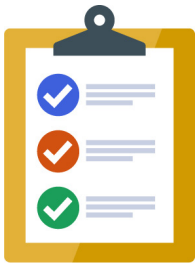
### **Example of a personal support team contact list:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Relation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (home): \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (cell): \_\_\_\_\_

### **List of personal and medical information**

- It is important to list the names of your medical team with their phone numbers. This can include:
  - doctors;
  - home care attendants; and
  - visiting nurse services that you use.
- Make sure to list the names and phone numbers of communication assistants, such as:
  - interpreters; and
  - interveners.
- If you live in a high-rise building, make sure to have the name and phone numbers of:
  - the building superintendent;
  - floor monitors; and
  - personal information.





- Consider creating a personal information checklist with information on your medical conditions.
- If it is hard for you to communicate during an emergency, this checklist will help health care providers and first responders:
  - know more about you and your needs; and
  - get in touch with members of your support network.
- Below is an example of a checklist.

**Example - Personal and medical information checklist:**

Prescription number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medication: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Medical equipment and aids: \_\_\_\_\_

Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

Chemical sensitivities: \_\_\_\_\_

Dietary needs: \_\_\_\_\_

Other needs: \_\_\_\_\_

Status card number: \_\_\_\_\_

Health card number (provincial or territorial): \_\_\_\_\_

Other health card numbers, such as First Nations and Inuit:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Health branch client identification number: \_\_\_\_\_

Private medical coverage: \_\_\_\_\_

Policy number: \_\_\_\_\_

Social worker or caseworker contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Neighbourhood contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Friend contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Out-of-town emergency contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Employment contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Service animal care: \_\_\_\_\_

Household pet care: \_\_\_\_\_

Veterinarian phone: \_\_\_\_\_



- Keep your contact list and personal information checklist:
  - on you;
  - somewhere that is easy to find at home (such as on the fridge or a bulletin board);
  - in your emergency kit; and/or
  - at your workplace.
- Give a copy to your support team.
- If appropriate, consider preparing a consent disclosure form or a similar legal document. The goal of this document is to allow health authorities and others to share your personal information with the person of your choice, such as:
  - a spouse;
  - a family member; or
  - a friend.
- You can find sample forms on some provincial health sites.

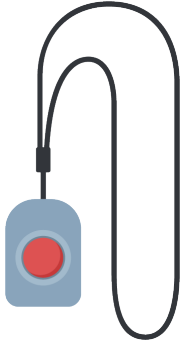


### **List of emergency numbers**

- It is a good idea to have a list of emergency numbers to keep somewhere that is easy to access. Consider including the following:
  - 911 (where available);
  - police;
  - fire;
  - telephone and video relay numbers;
  - telehealth;
  - poison control;
  - insurance contact; and
  - utility companies.



## Tips for contacting emergency services



- Sign up for the 911 text messaging service. You can do this by registering with your wireless service provider. This service is available in most areas of Canada.
- Consider using devices that communicate with emergency services.
  - These devices have an SOS button. When you press the button, the device sends a text message to contacts you registered in the device.
  - These devices can store your medical history.
  - They can also provide your GPS location to the contacts.

## Communication alerts

- Your communication plan should identify how you can become aware of an emergency.
- Here are some examples:



## Canada's National Public Alerting System

- This system allows emergency management organizations to warn the public of upcoming or ongoing threats, such as:
  - fires;
  - natural disasters;
  - environmental disasters; and
  - civil emergencies.
- These alerts can reach you through:
  - radio;
  - cable and satellite television; and
  - compatible wireless devices.
- You may be able to access alerts with accessibility tools, such as:
  - text-to-speech technology; and
  - vibrating alarms.







- Broadcasters may use text-to-speech technology to create an audio version of an alert message. Your device may be able to read emergency alerts to you if it supports this feature.
  - The vibration feature that comes with emergency alerts can warn you.



### Tip – Canadian alerting standards

- Some authorities or devices cannot produce or receive alerts that are compatible with tools such as:
  - text-to-speech; and
  - vibration.
- Check to see if your phone [will receive Canadian emergency alerts](#).



### Tip – Staying informed during COVID-19

- The Government of Canada created a guideline on [how to protect persons with disabilities from COVID-19](#).
- The COVID Alert app can let people know of possible exposures to the virus before any symptoms appear.
  - The app supports common adaptive technologies.
  - Check to see if it is available in your area.
- You can access a lot of information on COVID-19 and other emergencies online. If you have a hard time using a computer, consider getting assistive technology, such as:
  - voice-recognition software; or
  - eye-tracking devices.



### Note on rural and remote communities

- Persons with disabilities who live in rural and remote communities may not have access to reliable:
  - high-speed internet; and
  - cell service.
- If this is your case, identify the alert systems available in your area.



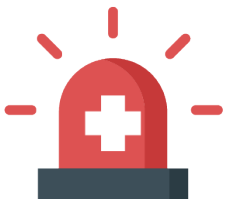
### Provincial and territorial alert systems

- These alert systems give information on emergencies in your province or territory. For example:
  - In British Columbia, EmergencyInfoBC has a [website](#) and a [Twitter account](#).
  - In Ontario, you can see emergency alerts on the [Ontario Alert Ready website](#). You can also see alerts on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
  - In Quebec, you can see emergency alerts on the [Quebec Alert Ready website](#).



### Tip – Staying informed during an emergency

- Stay tuned to local news channels.
- Be sure to have a portable, battery-operated or crank radio in your emergency kit in case of power outages.



### Smoke detectors and other alarms

- There are many ways to ensure smoke detectors and other alarms are accessible to you. For example:
  - Smoke detectors and other alarms can use strobe lights and vibration to alert you.
  - You can get personal alarms that make a loud noise to draw attention to your whereabouts.
  - You can get devices that give you visual notifications when someone knocks on the door or rings the doorbell.



## Emergency buttons in buildings

- Emergency buttons in buildings can give you a direct link to 911 or to the building's superintendent.
  - You can often find them in bedrooms and washrooms in seniors' buildings.

## Letting others know about your communication needs

Besides your personal support team, discuss your needs in the event of an emergency with:

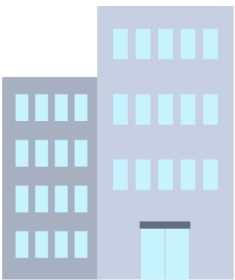
### Your employer

- Let your employer and co-workers know what help you will need in an emergency.
- Give them any other important information. This can include instructions for your mobility device or medical equipment.
- Discuss the best ways to alert you in an emergency.



### Building superintendent

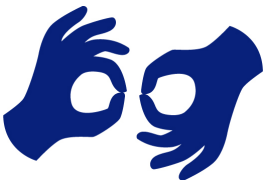
- Let your building superintendent know what you need during an emergency.
- Ask if there is an accessible way for you to get updates and information during an emergency.
  - For example: a pager linked to an emergency paging system at your workplace or the building you live in.
- If you live or work in a high-rise building and will need help during an emergency, ask your building manager to give you large printed signs.
  - You can place the signs in your window or door to let people know that you need help.





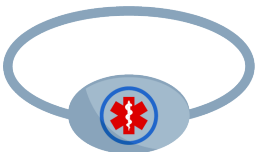
## Medical personnel

- Let hospital personnel, evacuation staff, first responders, and other people know:
  - if you may need help to communicate; and
  - how you communicate, such as with speech-to-text-apps or communication boards.
- Give medical personnel any forms you have prepared that identify your needs. These will usually set out:
  - how you communicate;
  - a brief medical history;
  - current medications and how they are taken;
  - how you show pain;
  - ways to help when you are distressed or upset;
  - allergies;
  - mobility needs;
  - help needed when eating or drinking;
  - favourite foods and drinks;
  - favourite leisure activities to pass the time; and
  - how and when to give information to a caregiver/ attendant.
- Ask what communication supports are available, such as:
  - sign language interpreters; and
  - communication kits at hospitals.



### Tip – If you cannot communicate

- Keep important medical information on you, for example in your wallet. First responders will search for this if you cannot communicate. For example:
  - Wear a medical alert bracelet or a similar identification tag. It can flag an important medical condition that might need immediate attention.



## Tip – Patient-provider communication

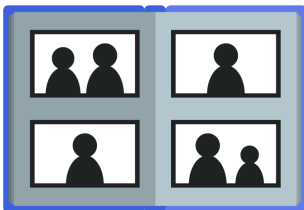
- Carry or ask for a hospital communication kit.
  - These kits give communication tools, like pictures or symbol cards.
  - They can be very useful for some people with disabilities, such as people who are:
    - Deaf;
    - deafblind; or
    - hard of hearing.
  - You can order these kits on the websites of many hearing organizations.
- Consult resources on patient-provider communication for persons with disabilities.
  - You can download them for free from the websites of many disability associations.



## Identifying your communication assistive devices before an emergency

Here are some assistive devices that may help you communicate during an emergency:

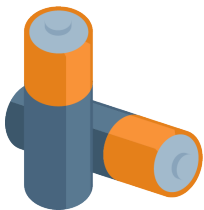
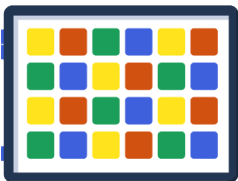
- a booklet with photos that give information about:
  - how you communicate; and
  - the assistance that you might need.
- a paper with pre-printed phrases you would use during an emergency, such as:
  - “I use American Sign Language”; or
  - “If you make announcements, I will need them in simple writing or signed”.
- cards that visually communicate information, such as In Case of Emergency (ICE) cards.
  - ICE cards are small cards on which you can write important health, personal and contact information. Some cards include a diagram for quick essential non-verbal communication. You can find some examples on disability association websites.





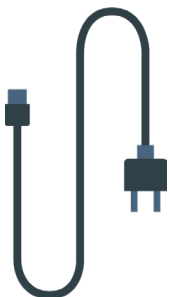
### Tip – communication devices

- In an emergency, bring your own communication devices with you to:
  - the hospital;
  - the evacuation centre; or
  - Emergency response locations.
- Let people know how to communicate with you.
- If you have a smartphone, load the apps you need to communicate, but test them first. Make sure that they work for you.
- Do an inventory of your assistive devices, including:
  - hearing aids;
  - personal amplifier;
  - reading devices; and
  - other devices that might help you communicate in an emergency.
- Keep battery-operated communications devices fully charged.



### Tip – prepare for power outages

- If you use an electronic assistive device, have alternative power sources on hand, such as batteries. They can be useful if there is a power outage.



### Tip – technology use in an emergency

- When using technology to communicate in an emergency or medical setting, have the following items on hand:
  - electrical cords and chargers;
  - an extension cord in case you are far from an outlet; and
  - extra batteries for your assistive devices.

## Communicating in emergencies when travelling

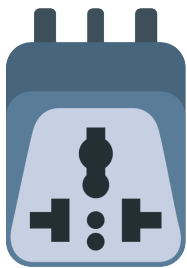


- Many countries do not have accessibility standards like those in Canada. Communication can be more challenging when travelling in a foreign country, especially during an emergency.
- Research services that are available for travelers with disabilities in your destination country.
- Embassies and consulates in Canada can help you.
- Visit [Global Affairs Canada](#) before travelling abroad. You can:
  - register as a traveler;
  - find helpful travel information; and
  - find safety tips.

### Tips for travel



- Check the Government of Canada’s [Travel and tourism website](#) for:
  - COVID-19 travel health notices; and
  - COVID-19 safety and security advice for Canadians abroad.
- Carry a copy of the booklet “[Bon Voyage, But...](#)”. The booklet contains contact information for your destination’s:
  - Canadian embassy or consulate; and
  - Canadian Emergency [Watch and Response Centre](#).
- You can find the booklet on the [Travel and tourism website](#).
- Inform your travel companions on how to assist you in an emergency.
- If you are travelling alone, create a network that can assist you during an emergency. Your network could include, for example, hotel staff. Let your network know how best to communicate with you.
- Before your trip, make sure that your assistive devices will work in another country.



## Other resources

- [Accessible travel in the context of COVID-19](#)
- [Covid-19 and persons with disabilities in Canada](#)
- [Environment and Climate Change Canada Weather Office](#)
- [List of TV channels with described video](#)



## Contact us!

Telephone: 1-833-854-7628

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