



## **Hospitalization Communication Guide for Individuals Who are Blind, Low Vision or DeafBlind**

Going to the hospital on any day can be stressful. Communicating in a fast paced environment when we don't feel well can be challenging. In normal times, hospitals must give services that help you understand what is being said and are suppose to ask you what services you need.

The hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic will be very different. Take time now to consider what you will need to take with you if you go to the hospital and how you will communicate with doctors, nurses and other health care staff. This guide is intended to help you get ready for a hospital visit.

Currently, many hospitals are seeing a large number of patients and often cannot provide the same services you normally expect. Many hospitals will not allow in-person interpreters, family members, or visitors to come into the hospital. You may be alone for a long time when you are in the hospital. Doctors and nurses in hospitals wear masks and gloves and may talk to you from behind a window or curtain, so it may be harder for you to understand them.

Below are some helpful ideas to help you prepare.

Put together an emergency bag with items you need. Label the bag and items with your name. Leave space on the label to add your hospital room number. Add a Braille label or bump dot to distinguish it as yours. The emergency bag might include:

- Your primary assistive technology devices (Magnifier, Laptop, Braille device)
- A backup assistive technology (e.g. slate and stylus, raised line paper, non-wifi recorder)
- Download free apps such as Seeing AI (to scan and read hospital documents), Be Specular (to be aware of your surroundings), VRI apps (for your Relay calls), or BARD Mobile (for news and reading), Notes or Speechy (to record and playback healthcare worker instructions).
- Plugs and chargers
- A cellular hotspot in case the hospital does not have Wi-Fi or it is not working well.
- An extension cord or power strip in case your bed is far from the outlet.
- Extra batteries for your assistive devices and/or hearing aids.
- A Ziploc-type bag to put your tablet or smartphone in. It will allow you to still operate the touchscreen through the plastic while protecting your device.
- A copy of your advance medical directive, if you have one. You can find more information and instructions to make an advance directive on [AARP's website](#)
- Emergency contact information for family members or friends

Disinfect your devices and related items, they can transmit viruses and bacteria. There are valid infection control issues for why a hospital might not let you bring a device, tablet or cell phone into an ICU or other medical environment. Devices, however, can be effectively

disinfected without damage to the device. Every hospital has an infection control officer or specialist. Ask them for help, if needed.

Document your need for assistive technology to communicate differently. Ask hospital staff to let you use your WiFi, and to put you in an area with strong WiFi for your communication needs. Tell hospital staff to communicate with you through your smartphone or device. As a backup, consider preparing a printed page saying you are Blind, Low Vision or DeafBlind and hospital staff should communicate with you.

Wear gloves and a mask, and require interpreter to wear gloves, a mask, and a gown when doing Tactile Sign or Print on Palm.

If the hospital staff refuses to talk with you or respect your wishes, ask for an “ethics consultation.”

If you have a service animal, you may need to decide if it is essential and speak with the hospital about allowing it to remain with you.

It is likely that if you are admitted you will be alone and not have anyone with you who understands your communication needs. Preparing now is important!

Missouri Assistive Technology Staff are available to answer your questions about being prepared for a hospitalization. You can contact us via phone at 816-655-6700, by TTY at 816-647-8558 or email at [info@mo-at.org](mailto:info@mo-at.org) .

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