

## Tips for Communicating While Wearing a Mask During an Infectious Disease Outbreak

Part of the APS Investigator Toolkit for COVID-19 located at <https://apstarc.acl.gov/Toolkits>.

**Follow guidance for handwashing, self-care, and physical distancing. DO NOT conduct investigations if you have any sickness (fever, cough, shortness of breath, etc.) or been exposed to someone with infectious disease symptoms in the last 14 days.**

### When Wearing a Mask



- Consider wearing a laminated large photo of yourself so that clients can better see your face or identify you.
- Imagine yourself as an actor. Use dramatic gestures and expressions.
- Be conscious of your body language.
- Practice kindness, patience, and empathy. Visits may take longer.
- Make client feel safe, be friendly, set the scene and tone.
- Show client what you are going to do before you start.
- Write things down if it is helpful for the client to better understand what you are trying to communicate.
- Follow up – Check if the client understands you by asking them to relay to you what they understood you to say.

### Show That You are Listening



- Nod to show you are listening and understanding.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Let your eyebrows tell the story.
- Face the client and try not to turn away when speaking.

### Show How You are Feeling



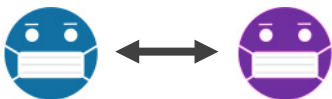
- Happiness: smile, raise eyebrows
- Concern: eyebrows pinched together and eyes drooping
- Remember: eyebrows in a “V” can mean “angry”

## Be Aware of How You are Speaking



- Be calm: speak clearly and use short, simple sentences.
- Try not to speak too loudly, too softly, or too fast or slow.
- Consider use of a portable voice amplifier.
- Say one thing at a time.
- Pause after asking questions.

## Suggestions for Maintaining Physical Distance



- Prior to your visit, identify plan for maintaining physical distance. Consider sitting outside if possible or on a porch or deck.
- Ask about chairs and possibly a table to gather around.
- Acknowledge to the client that you wish you could shake their hand but that because of the virus we need to be careful and look out for each other.

Clients with dementia may have trouble understanding social distancing protocols. To minimize unintentional physical contact with a client with dementia, plan ahead and bring items that could occupy the client's attention. For example:

- Bring along a magazine or card to give them.
- If their diet allows, bring or ask for a snack or drink for them.
- If they smoke and the smoke doesn't bother you, suggest that they smoke (if allowed).
- If they have a favorite hobby maybe a few of those items can be available during your visit.
- If visiting outside, maybe a walk & talk is appropriate.
- These ideas are intended to keep their hands and mind busy decreasing the chances of physical contact.

**Always follow your state, local or program guidelines/policy for client contacts.**  
 You may also consult federal [ACL.gov](https://www.acl.gov) and [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) guidance regarding in-person contact.

### Follow the APS TARC on Social Media!



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