

Wider Opening of Schools and Nurseries- Information from the Hearing Support Team: FAO SENCO/Head Teacher/Nursery Manager

As schools and nurseries begin opening to more children, we are contacting you regarding the hearing-impaired children who may be returning. At the time of writing we know of no specific Public Health guidance on the checking and maintenance of hearing equipment or how best to support pupils, particularly younger ones, in its use. We are therefore acting in regard to the more general public health guidance on health and safety arrangements in school.

Our priority, as yours, is the health and safety of the children and their families and the staff working with them. We want to support you in feeling confident about the safe return of children and young people to your setting and in meeting the needs of children and young people with a hearing loss, being mindful of the challenges this presents.

Returning to school or nursery after a long period of absence and to a relatively alien environment will be challenging for all of the children in your setting. However hearing impaired children may face a number of **additional challenges**:

- The critical listening distance for an HI child using hearing aids (HAs) and cochlear implant processors (CIs) is **2m maximum** indoors in a quiet environment. Outdoors this distance is reduced; the child may hear voices but not understand what is said. Social distancing may mean that a child cannot hear peers or staff as well as normal.
- HI children need to see, as well as hear to communicate well. Without clear access to speakers' faces they will miss vital information provided by facial expression and lip patterns. (Face masks will hinder access to communication for hearing impaired children and should be avoided)
- Some HI children will not have been wearing their HAs for some weeks and will need support to re-engage with their listening technologies. Many radio systems will have been at home during the school closure period. Some may be damaged and require attention.
- Children may not be close enough to adults or peers to gain a clear view of facial expressions or lip reading cues. Inadequate visual support can create anxiety in an HI child. HI children naturally move close to their friends and peers to communicate because this helps them hear and understand better.

- Some high-needs hearing impaired children and young people usually have direct support from staff from the Hearing Support Team e.g. Specialist Teaching Assistants and/or a visiting Teacher of the Deaf. We will work with you to find a solution that minimises risk whilst balancing this against the individual child's support needs.

Strategies that may reduce the challenges

- If possible, place the child with HI in their usual classroom and with at least one familiar adult
- Make sure adults are aware of the child's HI needs and ensure there is an adult in school who understands how to check and use the child's radio system
- Changes to the routines and environment need to be explained prior to, and again upon school return. A visual timetable could be introduced to support children's understanding of the changed routines, including new routines such as frequent handwashing times.
- The Hearing Support Team are available to support with equipment checks and maintenance, particularly upon the child's initial return to the setting. We may be able to support remotely, over the phone or via a video call or it may be possible to arrange a visit to the setting to do this if required.

Risk Assessment

Those children and young people who have an EHCP will have an individual risk assessment in place which may be reviewed on their return to school. Our Teachers are able to support you in addressing risks on an individual basis through the RA process. We have put together a checklist below of considerations and suggestions that you may like to think about in your setting, so that in these early days of return you can decide what systems will work best for you and your HI pupils to keep everybody safe. These considerations will also apply to children without an EHCP.

We have also included some guidance around the use and cleaning of specialist equipment e.g. radio aids.

If and when more guidance becomes available to support hearing impaired children we will share it with you. In the meantime, please do get in touch if you have any questions or concerns. You can contact us via our centralised email at ISDC@northlincs.gov.uk or by phoning 01724 407988 so that your query can be directed to the correct person.

Adjustment	Considerations
Positioning of HI pupil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the hearing impaired pupil is at the front of the group closest to the teacher, but to the side so they can turn to see other children who may be speaking • As pupils are more spread out in classrooms it will be more difficult for the HI pupil to hear what their classmates are saying from a distance. Please remember to repeat and re-phrase what is said.
Use and checking of hearing aids or cochlear implants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular cleaning of all types of personal hearing devices is recommended particularly during this current time. This should be done <u>at home</u> and according to manufacturer's guidance. • Ask parents/carers to ensure hearing aids or cochlear implants are checked and working before entering school. • Ask parents/carers to change hearing aid batteries regularly at home so that this does not need to be done during the school day • If a child needs support with their hearing aid during their time in school think about what you will do in this situation.
Use of radio aids eg Phonak Radio Aids and Touchscreens	<p>Phonak states, '<i>Sharing hand-held or body-worn products such as Roger mics between multiple users may create a risk for transfer of virus particles from one user to another. Even apparently healthy individuals could have an unrecognized coronavirus condition, so a sanitization step when switching users is strongly recommended.</i>'</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   </div> <p><i>We are aware that the context in each school is different and therefore that different ways to reduce risk may be appropriate in different places.</i></p> <p>Please use the questions below to think through what works best for the HI pupil in your school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the pupil need to use radio aid technology ie will their learning environment be quieter than before and are they at the front of the group, or are they likely to be learning outside, at a distance from the speaker and therefore more in need of the equipment? • Can the number of people having contact with radio aid equipment be reduced? (eg by not taking it home, and keeping to one sole user in school) Other children should not use the radio transmitter or hand-held microphone at this time. • If the microphone has to be shared are you able to follow the advice about cleaning? How will you ensure the lanyard is also kept as clean as

possible to minimise risk? [Please see manufacturer's sanitization guidelines.](#)

Please note: Only use wipes that have a water based disinfectant e.g. Phonak Cleaning and Care Wipes (C&C Wipes) are manufacturer recommended.

The Hearing Support Team have placed an order for these manufacturer recommended wipes and will supply them if needed (we have been advised that these are currently in stock)

- Can the pupil be responsible for taking off their own receivers and be independent in storing them safely in school or be supported to do so?
- Will the teacher synch. the microphone to the pupil's receivers rather than passing it to them? (the microphone needs to be synched at 10cm from receiver). Will the teacher be responsible for charging the microphone?
- Is the member of staff working with the hearing- impaired pupil familiar to them and are they confident in using the hearing technology?

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or concerns about a hearing impaired child returning to your setting.

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Lead Teacher

Disability Service: Hearing Support Team

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