

Advice for blind and partially sighted people during coronavirus (COVID-19)

We're sorry if this letter is difficult for you to read. We want you to know that there are organisations which can help you during this very difficult time and wanted to get in touch as soon as possible.

This letter is in large print - if you would prefer a different format, please let us know.

We appreciate that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may be causing you many additional challenges so we've brought together some key contact numbers and advice on how to get support in your local community below. You'll also find answers to the questions we're being asked the most, but please don't hesitate to call if you need help.

RNIB's Helpline (0303 123 9999) has extended its opening hours. It is now open on weekdays (from 8am-8pm) and on Saturdays (from 9am-5pm). In addition to the usual help and advice on living with sight loss, our advisers can connect you to local support, and assist you in signing up to telephone and online groups that may offer a source of comfort in these times. Through the same number, you can also access pre-recorded information on the coronavirus and the Government's response.

Also, Guide Dogs' COVID-19 information line (0800 781 1444) is open on weekdays (from 9am-5pm). It supplies answers and information, for adults and families of children with sight loss, about living actively, independently and keeping well during the coronavirus outbreak. Whether you're asking for yourself, a member of your family, or your child, both organisations offer online support and telephone services, and can help you access services from other providers.

Finding local support

Communities across the UK have mobilised so they can help people who need additional support locally. We have put together a list of organisations across the UK who can help you. This information is available through both the RNIB Helpline and the Guide Dogs information line. Local authorities can also provide essential supplies – you can get in touch with them directly for more information or call us.

Eye Health

During this time, you may be concerned about attending eye clinic appointments. Hospitals have rearranged their clinics to reduce the risk and minimise contact with other patients and staff. You can always call the hospital to seek advice. If you have a sudden change in your vision or new symptoms, contact your optician or eye doctor immediately. It is important you seek help, please don't ignore symptoms.

Shopping for food and essentials

Supermarkets are changing their delivery services to prioritise the needs of clinically vulnerable people, but we know many people are still struggling. The situation is changing daily and we are taking action to raise your concerns directly with the supermarkets. NHS volunteers across the UK are collecting essential supplies for people unable to leave the house. If you are worried we can help.

Getting out and about

Although social distancing can be difficult, it's really important for your mental and physical health that you still go outside and get exercise. So, if you don't live with someone who is able to guide you, think about using your cane to alert people to your sight loss when you go out. Alternatively, you can let others know of your proximity verbally and that you are unaware of exactly where they are.

Keeping connected

During this time, it's especially important you stay connected with the outside world; whether it's having Skype calls with family and friends, joining a Talk and Support group through the RNIB Helpline or signing up to a Keeping in Touch call with Guide Dogs. There are many sight loss forums available and most are open to your family and friends too. Having regular contact with people will help you to stay feeling positive.

If you also want to stay connected with the latest developments and information on coronavirus (COVID-19) and sight loss, listen to RNIB Connect Radio, the UK's radio station for blind and partially sighted people. It's available on Freeview 730 and online www.rnibconnectradio.org.uk

Contact us

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We know this is a difficult time and many people are feeling worried and isolated. These are just a few of the ways we can help you during this time - there is lots more advice for blind and partially sighted people available. So, please get in touch if we can help.

Stay safe.

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