

Communicating Effectively: How SLPs Help COVID-19 Survivors With Speech and Language Problems

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can help people with—or recovering from—COVID-19 who have difficulty communicating. These challenges may stem from a variety of COVID-19-related causes, including speech difficulties due to vocal cord damage from ventilator use or language problems from a COVID-19-related stroke. **SLPs help in these areas:**



- **Speech Problems.** Some people who spent a significant amount of time on a ventilator, experienced low oxygen to the brain, or had a stroke may experience muscle weakness or reduced coordination in the muscles of the face, lips, tongue, and throat—making it difficult to talk. This can lead to a motor speech disorder called *dysarthria*. SLPs can help people strengthen their muscles, slow their rate of speech, and say sounds more clearly to improve communication. Some survivors may also experience *apraxia of speech*, which is when someone is unable to plan and sequence required speech movements for the words their brain intends.
- **Language Difficulties.** Some people, particularly those who suffered a stroke or other brain damage from ventilator use, may experience a language disorder called *aphasia*. Aphasia can make it hard for someone to understand, speak, read, or write. Some people may have trouble finding the right word, putting words together into sentences, switching sounds in words, following conversations, or understanding jokes. SLPs work with patients through targeted therapy to improve their communication and understanding.
- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication.** People who have severe speech and/or language difficulties may need to find other ways to answer questions or tell people what they want. This may be temporary, such as while one is in the hospital, but it could also last longer. Techniques may include using simple hand gestures, writing, pointing to letters or pictures, or using a computer. These are all forms of *augmentative and alternative communication* (AAC). SLPs help find the appropriate AAC method to meet an individual's needs.

Learn more about how SLPs help with adult speech and language problems. Visit www.asha.org/public.

