

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

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Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

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Mánnystrie O Poustie

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[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)



**DfC**

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Health and Social  
Care Board

**The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is a new experience for all of us and very difficult in many ways. We know that some people may be feeling worried and isolated at this time. We want you to know that we are here to help.**

This document highlights some key contact numbers and advice on how to get support in your local community. Please don't hesitate to call any of the contact numbers below if you need help.

### **Sources of help and support**

Communities and organisations across Northern Ireland have mobilised so they can help people who need additional support locally. This support may be in relation to shopping, medication, emotional or practical support, staying connected and having others to talk to, and ideas to keep active or stimulated during this time. This information is available from a number of sources including those listed below:

#### **COVID-19 COMMUNITY HELPLINE**

**(Freephone: 0808 802 0020)**

provided by the Department for Communities.

This helpline is managed by Advice NI and is open 9am to 5pm, seven days a week. If you need food or other essential support, please contact this number. With your permission, the team may share your details with the Health Trusts and / or local Councils who will arrange the necessary support.

**You can also get in touch by email and text message:**

**Email: [covid19@adviceni.net](mailto:covid19@adviceni.net)**

**Text: ACTION to 81025**

**RNIB HELPLINE (Freephone: 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.

**GUIDE DOGS COVID-19 INFORMATION LINE** (Freephone: **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, we can offer online support and telephone services, and can help you access services from other organisations.

### **Sensory Support Teams**

The Health and Social Care Sensory Support Service is a team of specialist staff who work to reduce the impact of sight and sensory loss on people's daily lives by supporting their independence and by focusing on their individual needs, as well as raising awareness in the community. They do this through specialist assessment and support.

**Should you require their assistance please contact NI Direct on 0300 200 7898 for the phone number and contact details of your nearest team.**

### **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 Northern Ireland Executive, relevant departments, as well as supermarkets, both regionally and locally. Volunteers across Northern Ireland are collecting essential supplies for people unable to leave their home.

**If you require information or assistance in accessing food, please contact the COVID-19 COMMUNITY HELPLINE (Freephone: 0808 802 0020).**

If you encounter any difficulties or have additional queries, please feel free to contact either Guide Dogs or RNIB.

### **Staying Active**

Although social distancing can be difficult, it's really important for your mental and physical health that you still go outside and get exercise, while ensuring that you adhere to current Government advice. 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 regular phone or Skype calls with family and friends, or joining a Talk and Support group through the RNIB Helpline. There are many sight loss forums available and most are open to your family and friends too. This type of contact can help you stay positive.

It is always important to look after your mental and emotional wellbeing. RNIB's Need to Talk team support adults and young people over the age of eleven who are blind or partially sighted, and anyone who supports a person with sight loss, to face the future with confidence. The team have introduced Emergency Mental Health sessions to offer crucial emotional and mental support for blind and partially sighted people during this time.

**You can find out more by contacting our  
RNIB Helpline on: 0303 123 9999,  
or by emailing: [needtotalk@rnib.org.uk](mailto:needtotalk@rnib.org.uk)**

The Public Health Agency also have guidance on looking after your mental health while staying at home. You can find this information on the following website:

**<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/take-5-steps-wellbeing-looking-after-your-mental-health-while-you-stay-home>**

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](http://www.rnibconnectradio.org.uk)**

## Contact Us

### **RNIB HELPLINE (Freephone: 0303 123 9999)**

Is open from 8am-8pm on weekdays and on Saturdays from 9am-5pm.

### **GUIDE DOGS COVID-19 INFORMATION LINE**

**(Freephone: 0800 781 1444)** is open on weekdays from 9am-5pm.

### **The Department for Communities COVID-19 COMMUNITY HELPLINE (Freephone: 0808 802 0020)**

which is open 9am to 5pm, seven days a week.

Other sources of support can be found through the Public Health Agency's Helplines NI directory: **[www.helplinesni.com](http://www.helplinesni.com)**

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.**

If you would prefer this information in a different format, please contact RNIB and Guide Dogs on the freephone numbers provided.