

A GUIDE TO REMOTE WORKING IN AUDIOLOGY SERVICES DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Adult hearing services (assessment and rehabilitation)

Wax management

At the time of writing, the joint BAA, BSA, BSHAA and AIHHP guidance document, '[Audiology and otology guidance during Covid-19](#)' (1st May 2020) suggests that wax management advice can be delivered remotely. To facilitate this, a guide for patients is included in Appendix A, which can be delivered verbally, posted or emailed to those patients who are suspected to be routine (e.g. there is no evidence in their clinical record that an eardrum perforation is present). Both the NICE '[Hearing Loss](#)' guideline (NICE, 2018) and '[Earwax](#)' clinical knowledge summary (NICE, 2016) are useful resources for clinicians who may need to deliver wax management advice remotely, but who aren't familiar with the evidence base.

Remote hearing assessments

Remote assessment can provide support for patients (with a focus on their listening needs, not their audiogram) and information gained can be used to triage face-to-face assessments. This means fewer patients need to attend clinic during COVID-19, and those that do can have shorter appointments, less frequently (resulting in more efficient use of clinical time/resources). For a new adult hearing pathway, support provided remotely could include communication support, assistive listening device advice, signposting to online support and onward referral for treatment (e.g. bothersome tinnitus), before any visits to clinic are required. These decisions are of course dependent on the patient's individual situation. For information on assessing individual need please see 'Practical Guidelines for Remote Care' document and the 'Heads of Service' Webinar (held on the 7th May, recording available shortly after).

Remote hearing aid fittings

Connection of remote hearing aids to the patient’s app is usually done in the clinic, during the fitting appointment, alongside probe microphone measures. During COVID-19 the ‘pairing’ of the hearing aids to the phone app could be done at home (instructing the patient over video). The initial hearing aid set-up however would need to be done in clinic prior to posting, which is no different to non-remote programming hearing aids being posted out (see Table 1).

- For details, see BAA resources detailing remote programming hearing aids and remote care and telehealth platform options: <https://www.baaudiology.org/webinar-follow-up-documents/> (under ‘remote programming’).
- For examples of SOPs, patient letters and IMP from Plymouth see BAA website (alongside ‘remote working’ documents).

TABLE 1: Setting-up hearing aids in the clinic ready to post to patients (non-remote and remote programming technology)

| | First Fit | Exchange/update |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Frequency-gain response | Open fit = Click n fit* NAL-NL2 (a coupler can be useful to check function of aid prior to programming). Ear Mould = Coupler fit* NL2 Incorporating a previously measured RECD into the coupler fitting would be the gold standard for update fittings (BSA, 2018). | Measure settings of current aids (i.e. same model in test box), consider patient’s problems, consider best settings* (may not be NL2, especially for severe and profound losses). |
| Features | VC on as standard on non-remote aids (to ensure comfort). All other features to be discussed with the patient prior to posting. | |

***It is suggested that Real Ear Probe Microphone verification be performed once COVID-19 restrictions being lifted, unless measured RECD has been used in coupler measures.**

Table 2: Tools, apps and websites to support adults remotely.

| Type of support | Name | Link | Details |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|--|---|
| Hearing screening | hearWHOpro | https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/hearwhopro/id1488721274 | Free hearing test app by the HearX group in conjunction with World Health Organization (based on digits in noise, suitable for older teenagers and adults only). Gives a single number score which indicates hearing ability: good hearing/check regularly/some degree of hearing loss. |
| | Sound Scouts | https://www.soundscouts.com/en-gb/ | Hearing assessment for adults. Needs someone with normal hearing for basic calibration. Costs c. £1.99 per assessment. Gives results in or outside normal range |
| | Nuheara | https://www.nuheara.com/hearing-check/ | Digits in noise test. Free. Emails you a traffic-light result. |
| Ear Disease screening | CEDRA | https://cedra.northwestern.edu/ | A questionnaire to triage and assess ear disease without otoscopy. Can be accessed online by the patient directly. |
| Rehabilitation | IDA tools | https://idainstitute.com/tools/telecare/ | Tools can be accessed online by the patient directly, along with advice and support. |
| | Photosharing | Saunders, G (2019) Photo-sharing as an audiological rehabilitation tool. The hearing journal. Vol 72, issue 9. doi: 10.1097/01.HJ.0000582436.09398.32 | Photosharing supports rehabilitation by allowing listening needs to be shared, more effective problem-solving and improved communication and understanding between patient and clinician. |
| Assistive listening devices | Connevans | https://www.connevans.co.uk/catalogue/11/Deaf-Equipment https://www.connevans.co.uk/catalogue/10888618/My-Hearing-Aid | ALDs for use with and without hearing aids. Enables patients to see which ALDs are suitable for their make/model of hearing aid. |
| | Action on hearing loss | https://beta.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/information-and-support/technology-and-products/ | ALDs which can be used with or without hearing aids. |
| Accessibility during COVID-19 | Louder than words | https://louderthanwords.org.uk/help-employees-with-hearing-loss-stay-connected-during-covid-19/ | Support for employees and employers when using remote conferencing at work. |
| | Action on Hearing loss | https://beta.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/coronavirus-response/ | Support and advice related to COVID-19. |

| Type of support | Name | Link | Details |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Accessibility during COVID-19 | Sign Health | https://signhealth.org.uk/resources/coronavirus/ | Daily updates on COVID-19 in BSL |
| | Age UK | https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/video-calling/ | Support for older adults learning to use video conferencing technology. |
| Hearing aid maintenance and support | C2Hear | https://c2hearonline.com/ | Maintenance: re-tubing, cleaning, fitting (open fit and ear mould). Counselling: adapting to hearing aids, expectations, acclimatisation, communication tactics. |
| | Manufacturer support videos | https://www.oticon.com/support/downloads https://www.phonak.com/uk/en/support/product-support/hearing-aids.html https://www.resound.com/en-gb/help https://www.starkey.co.uk/hearing-aid-use-and-care/instructional-videos https://www.signia-hearing.co.uk/how-to-videos/ | Instructions, videos on each type of hearing aid can be shared with patients. |
| | AoHL | https://beta.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/information-and-support/ | Support and advice on a wide range of topics: ear health, hearing loss, tinnitus, benefits, technology and ALDs, Deaf awareness, care and support services. |
| Tinnitus support | BTA | https://www.tinnitus.org.uk/COVID-19-guidance-for-professionals | The BAA and British Tinnitus Association have partnered to produce guidance for professionals on remote working during COVID-19. BTA also have a range of useful resources for patients. |
| | AoHL | https://beta.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/information-and-support/technology-and-products/technology-to-manage-your-tinnitus/ | Equipment to manage tinnitus. |
| | Holistic | For details of free holistic resources which use mindfulness and meditation to help patients manage anxiety and sleep problems, see the 'Vestibular Service' document. | |

Bibliography:

Aaron, K., Cooper, T.E., Warner, L., Burton, M.J. (2018). Ear drops for the removal of ear wax. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2018, Issue 7. Art. No.: CD012171. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD012171.pub2.

ASHA (2020) Telepractice. Available at: https://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589934956§ion=Key_Issues

BSA (2018) Practice Guidance: Guidance on the verification of hearing devices using probe microphone measurements. Available at: <https://www.thebsa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/REMS-2018.pdf>

BAA, BSA, BSHAA and AIHHP (2020) Joint Guidance- release 1 <https://www.baaudiology.org/app/uploads/2020/04/FINAL-COVID-19-joint-guidance-8-4-20.pdf>

BAA, BSA, BSHAA and AIHHP (2020) Joint Guidance- release 2 <https://www.baaudiology.org/app/uploads/2020/05/Covid-19-audiology-and-otology-guidance-1-May-2020.pdf>

National Institute of Clinical Excellence (2016) Earwax. Available at: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/earwax>

National Institute of Clinical Excellence (2018) Hearing loss in adults: assessment and management. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG98>

Saunders, G (2019) Photo-sharing as an audiological rehabilitation tool. *The hearing journal*. Vol 72, issue 9. doi: 10.1097/01.HJ.0000582436.09398.32

Swanepoel, D-W., Hall. J (2020) Making Audiology work during COVID-19 and beyond. Online only. <https://journals.lww.com/thehearingjournal/blog/OnlineFirst/pages/post.aspx?PostID=59>

Appendix A

Wax Management Advice for Patients

- Using wax softeners *may* help to clear ear wax in 22% of cases¹.
- There are many different types of wax softener, including olive oil, water or sodium bicarbonate-based products. However, one type has not been proven to be better than any other².
- It may be sensible to choose a type of wax softener that you have used before, if you didn't have any adverse reaction to it.
- If your chosen product has been purchased at the pharmacy, follow the guidelines for use that are given on the packaging.
- If you are unable to visit a pharmacy, it may be helpful to know that you can use water instead. The water should be around body temperature but **should not** be pressurised (i.e. from a shower head). Instil the water in the affected ear 3-4 times daily, for 5 days.
- Mild discomfort or irritation, and a temporary reduction in hearing, are not uncommon with wax softener application. However, stop using the wax softener if:
 - a. you can taste or feel the product at the back of your throat during application, or
 - b. have any significant skin reaction or discomfort, or
 - c. you get pain or discharge (other than wax) from your ears.
- Wax softeners can block or damage hearing aids (if worn). After wax softener application, make sure you wait until your ear/s are dry again before re-inserting your hearing aid/s.
- Do not attempt to remove the wax yourself by inserting any object (e.g. a cotton bud) down your ear.
- If you have tried wax softeners and your symptoms do not improve, let your Audiologist know.

¹ Aaron K, Cooper TE, Warner L, Burton MJ. Ear drops for the removal of ear wax. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2018, Issue 7. Art. No.: CD012171. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD012171.pub2.

² National Institute of Clinical Excellence (2018). Hearing loss in adults: assessment and management. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG98>