**Frequently Asked Questions**

**The information provided is compiled from resources from the American Speech/Hearing Association (ASHA), the Educational Audiology Association (EAA), Technology Considerations to Improve Access, Involvement, Outcomes-Tech Talk, and leading manufacturers of Hearing Assistance Technology.**

**I know masks make it difficult to communicate, I’ve experienced it myself! Can you tell me why masks make communication so difficult, especially in children?**

* **Increased difficulty in understanding speech:** Masks attenuate sound by 3–12 dB and also result in low-pass filtering of high-frequency sounds, making it more difficult to understand speech and some higher-pitched voices (Goldin et al., 2020).

For example, if the child has trouble hearing higher sounds, they may be missing sounds like “s”, “t”, “sh”, “f”, “th”, etc.  These sounds come up a lot in our language so it can be very hard to understand, even with normal hearing.  Listening to masked speech can be especially hard for people with hearing loss.

* **Reduced discrimination of speech signal among competing noise:** For example, reduced discrimination may occur in the presence of typical classroom noise, such as the HVAC system or typical student movement in the classroom.
* **Reduced intelligibility of the wearer’s speech:**Listeners may perceive speech as muffled or lower in volume.
* **Loss of visual cues:** Masks remove the ability to speech read and see facial expressions, which augment communication.
* **Increased difficulty of verbal communication:** Speaking and understanding language while wearing a mask can be hard for people with communication problems like aphasia, voice problems, and autism.
* **Reduced ability to provide appropriate cues to the client/student:**Masks can reduce one’s ability to provide communication cues—for example, in the case of speech sound production.
* **Noncompliance of mask wearing:**Masks can be uncomfortable for young and school-aged children, and for people who wear hearing aids or cochlear implants. Noncompliance with mask use can also be an issue for those with cognitive or sensory deficits. Your educational audiologist can provide information regarding options to assist with improved comfort while wearing masks.

This link can help you to understand the impact of communication in your classroom, when a child is having difficulty hearing the instruction presented.

<https://www.citiboces.org/cms/lib/NY01914085/Centricity/domain/16/2018-2019/audiology/Cascading-Impact-of-Hearing-Loss-on-Access-to-School-Communication.pdf>