



Cambridgeshire Hearing Help

Risk Assessment and Contingency Plan in the light of Covid-19

Introduction

Cambridgeshire Hearing Help has always maintained the highest levels of hygiene in our work, providing a safe service to our users and for our staff and volunteers. We are conscious that the vast majority of our volunteers and users are considered vulnerable to the spread of Covid-19 and have undertaken a regularly updated risk assessment, laying out our plan to maintain our service as far as possible, whilst ensuring necessary levels of protection to all involved. We would like to thank all staff, volunteers and users for your continuing contribution to Cambridgeshire Hearing Help, and hope that this guidance provides clarity and reassurance during what is a very difficult time.

Guidance

In addition to the NHS guidance to anyone concerned about Covid-19 <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>, the NHS has issued guidance to community-based health and social care organisations <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings-on-covid-19/guidance-for-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings-on-covid-19> and for residential home, supported living and home care <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance>

We are in the 'social care' sector where it is not possible to undertake all work from home, but we have to be mindful of Government advice for social distancing and to avoid congregating, and we do not have access to materials or training for the use of Personal Protective Equipment.

We have also consulted the NHS Local Protection Team, who have advised that there are no special arrangements in place relevant to our service, beyond the official guidance. They have advised that there are no special arrangements in place at present to supply us with sanitiser or other personal protective equipment, and we are concerned about current difficulties in sourcing hand sanitiser.



It is anticipated that the official advice will itself be updated on a regular basis. Cambridgeshire Hearing Help undertakes to regularly review and fully respect Government and NHS guidance at all times.

Response by other voluntary sector organisations.

The principal guidance to charities such as ours at a national level comes from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/coronavirus>

We have also reviewed Charity Commission guidance, which is restricted to when to report specific incidence of Covid-19.

Our equivalent organisations in Norfolk, Essex and in Hertfordshire, Norfolk Deaf Association, Hearing Help Essex and Hertfordshire Hearing Advisory Service, have all decided to suspend all hearing aid maintenance sessions. Our equivalent organisation working with blind and partially-sighted people, Camsight, have decided to stop all group sessions.

Our duty of care to staff and volunteers

Cambridgeshire Hearing Help will continue to fully uphold our duty of care to our staff and volunteers. We recognise that many of our volunteers are in the 'vulnerable' risk category themselves, because of age or health issues. We have decided to communicate to our volunteers that they are not expected to continue volunteering with us for the duration of this outbreak, unless they explicitly tell us they wish to do so. We will always fully uphold our responsibilities to our staff as a good employer.

Current feedback and experience

We have received feedback and enquiries from volunteers and venues, raising questions about our practice in these circumstances. Some volunteers have considered themselves to be 'vulnerable' have already chosen not to continue volunteering in the circumstances. We fully support their decision. We have had numerous venues including Medical Practices and



libraries who have decided to cancel our visit to their premises until further notice, which has already meant suspension of our activities there. Our social groups have suspended their meetings.

All of our staff team were consulted about contingency arrangements and have assisted in drawing up our contingency plan. Our Trustees have consulted on this with the Chair. Our thanks to all of them.

Contingency plan.

1. Cambridgeshire Hearing Help will suspend all its clinics in external venues. Any service user whose hearing aid does not work, will be asked to contact the Audiology Department or Specsavers, from where it was first supplied. No examination or receipt of hearing aids will take place by Cambridgeshire Hearing Help until further notice.
2. However, we will continue to provide batteries by post. Service users are asked to write with a self-addressed envelope (with a Large Stamp) and batteries will be dispatched in return. We will continue to receive requests for batteries and other enquiries by telephone, if service users have difficulty in doing this. We will do our best to continue to respond to telephone enquiries during our advertised times, but the need to respect social distancing for our staff may restrict this at times.
3. Cambridgeshire Hearing Help recognises that we are the first point of contact with many vulnerable people in our community and will continue to explore all means of continuing to support our service users in different ways, particularly those at greatest risk, in these exceptional circumstances.
4. We have communicated to all volunteers that they are not expected to continue their volunteering with us for the duration of the outbreak. Volunteers are asked to inform us if they are self-isolating in all circumstances, as there may be implications for other staff, volunteers or users with whom they have been in contact, during activities run by Cambridgeshire Hearing Help.
5. We maintain a schedule of Residential homes and individuals living at home who we would normally visit, and seek to ensure hearing aid batteries are dispatched to them as needed.
6. We will continue to ask venues to display a poster, where possible, to inform users who visit a venue explaining sessions have been suspended and giving alternative arrangements by post, telephone or email. We ensure Cambridgeshire Hearing Help's website and social media are kept up-to-date.



7. A contingency has been discussed whereby staff members work from home, as far as possible. Supervisors are able to continue undertaking orders for example, through estimating supplies. Administrative staff would have the office telephone diverted to their home during their normal hours of work, and be able to continue respond to enquiries. All staff have access to a PC they can use in those circumstances.
8. Where Cambridgeshire Hearing Help provides batteries for hearing aids by post, this work will be undertaken by paid staff at the office, with only one person being present on any one day, fully respecting guidance on social distancing.
9. An answerphone message has been prepared to reflect these new arrangements and to inform service users about the provision for receiving batteries by post.
10. Ordering of supplies will seek to ensure we have a good supply of batteries and sets of 'open fits', to assist with delivering these by post.
11. If a service user is left at home unable to access our service and one of our staff or volunteers becomes concerned about their ability to manage independently, we will continue to refer them to Social Services at referral.centre-adults@cambridgeshire.gov.uk telephone 0345 045 5202.
12. All staff and volunteers are asked to fully respect this contingency plan, to protect their own health and safety, together with others in the organisation.
13. Arrangements will continue to be coordinated by the Chief Executive Officer and all staff are aware he is contactable by telephone 24/7 where issues arise.
14. Provision of our service will necessarily be affected at this time, and Cambridgeshire Hearing Help will ensure our major funders are informed of these decisions, and is grateful for their understanding in these exceptional circumstances.
15. We will keep changes in guidance under constant review, together with feedback from staff, volunteers and users, and be prepared to further amend this plan at short notice, and on a rolling basis. This is already the third iteration of this plan.

We express our thanks to staff, volunteers and users for your understanding and your commitment to Cambridgeshire Hearing Help.

Richard Howitt
Chief Executive Officer
Roger Hill
Chair
Cambridgeshire Hearing Help
Last updated: 24 March 2020