



**ASHA**  
American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

December 11, 2020

The Honorable Mike Parson  
201 W Capitol Ave.  
Room 216  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

RE: COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Protocol

Dear Governor Parson:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to request that audiologists and speech-language pathologists be given priority access to the initial distribution of COVID-19 vaccines approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 211,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. As of January 2020, there were 320 audiologists and 3,906 speech-language pathologists who are ASHA members in the state of Missouri.<sup>1</sup>

Audiologists identify and treat hearing, balance, and other auditory disorders. Audiologists must come in close contact with clients in order to effectively examine and treat their client's condition; thereby, increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Deaf or hard of hearing individuals who use lipreading to communicate, as well as audiologists and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) who treat them, need clear masks that are not always available.

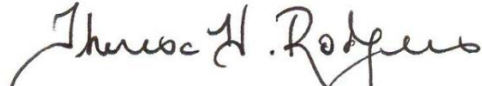
SLPs assess and treat speech, language, social communication, cognitive-communication, and swallowing disorders in individuals across the lifespan. SLPs provide essential communication services to individuals with a variety of disabilities. Many individuals with communication disabilities are unable to wear a mask for sensory, physical, or other reasons. Other clients may need to remove their mask to engage in assessment or therapy tasks. While the utilization of clear facial masks is advantageous for some clinicians, this type of personal protective equipment (PPE) is not always readily available nor appropriate for clients in all settings—particularly during speech therapy interventions.

Audiologists and SLPs provide essential services to individuals with communication, swallowing, and cognitive disorders in a variety of settings including hospitals, long-term care facilities, schools, client homes, and private clinics. While some providers have been able to adapt their service delivery by conducting assessments and treatments remotely via telepractice, there are circumstances where this is not an option. Some audiologists and SLPs continue providing services for those with communication disorders in person despite a lack of adequate PPE. As noted above, individuals with hearing loss and other communication disorders face challenges when wearing a mask and adhering to social distancing, which places audiologists and SLPs at a greater risk for contracting COVID-19 as a direct result of their work.

Audiologists and SLPs recognize that effective communication is a human right—essential for human interaction—and are willing to put themselves in harm's way every day to ensure that individuals with communication disorders receive the treatment they need and deserve. ASHA members know that hearing loss, speech, language, cognitive, and swallowing disorders can have lasting impacts on the health, welfare, and safety of individuals throughout their lives.

I urge you to grant audiologists and SLPs prioritized access to the initial distribution of FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Janet Deppe, ASHA's director of state affairs, at [jdeppe@asha.org](mailto:jdeppe@asha.org).

Sincerely,



Theresa H. Rodgers, MA, CCC-SLP  
2020 ASHA President

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<sup>1</sup> American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *State Quick Facts About the Professions*. <https://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/quick-facts/>.