

AEA Guidelines for Professional Hearing Care for COVID-19 – 18th of March 2020



Dear AEA member, dear Hearing Aid Professional,

After discussing with the AEA management, all board members and based on the experience of our FIA colleagues in Italy, we developed the **AEA Guidelines for Professional Hearing Care during the COVID-19 period.**

General:

We deliver essential health care and in these critical days, we need to avoid that our healthcare professionals would no longer be able to work or would spread the virus.

Hearing and communication are essential in this COVID-19 period. Individuals need to access news reports from television and Internet. In a time when people are practicing social distancing, they need to be able to communicate virtually via phone and other virtual platforms with loved ones. Therefore, we need to be able to **provide essential care for urgent matters.**

On the other side, our clients, mostly in the 65+ age group are much more vulnerable and sensitive for COVID-19, so **we need to reduce the risks.**

First of all, this **guideline is based on hearing care for clients who are asymptomatic/not infected with COVID-19,** they have other, more urgent healthcare needs.

Second of all, we split the guidelines for activities with or without masks since the **availability of masks is very regional and time dependent.**

Therefore, we developed this 5-step action plan for Hearing Aid Professionals, **but please make sure to also be compliant with your local health care guidelines for COVID-19:**

Steps where no medical masks are needed

- **Step 1 – When clients call for advice, support or an appointment – do as much as you can by information and counselling over the phone/video-call/ email:**
 - When a client calls, first of all, listen if the advice, support or counselling cannot be delivered over the phone/video-call/email.
 - When they are only in need of batteries, cleaning and maintenance products, these can easily be shipped, so no need to come to the hearing centre.
 - Do not limit the advice to what the client advisor can deliver, but also include the Hearing Aid Professional in telephonic advice and counselling.
 - When an appointment is mandatory, go to step 2

- **Step 2 – Run the COVID-19 triage, preferably by phone or mail before making the appointment:**

COVID-19 Triage: Ask all questions below.

 1. Have you recently travelled to an area with known local spread of COVID-19? Yes / No
 2. Have you come into close contact (within 1 meter) with someone who has a laboratory confirmed COVID – 19 diagnosis in the past 14 days? Yes / No
 3. Do you have a fever (greater than 37,50°C) OR symptoms of lower respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing? Yes / No

If the answer is yes on one of the questions, then do not make the appointment and reschedule after they can confirm they are healthy again.

Telephonic/Video-call/email advice or remote care are alternatives.

- **Step 3 – The appointment in the hearing centre without medical face masks class I (EN 14683:2014):**

First of all, take these measures for the hearing centre:

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- Avoid gatherings in the shop, possibly regulating/limiting the access with the regulated opening of the entrance doors. We recommend to only allow maximum 2 people in the waiting room except for larger waiting rooms.
- Ensure a minimum distance of more than 1 meter (social distancing – this is country-specific, see your local guidelines) between the patients and between the latter and the hearing care professionals as well as the staff. Set the chairs in the waiting room at more than 1 meter apart.
- Wash your hands frequently and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Make products for hand sanitization or disinfection available to the patients.
- Clean the rooms thoroughly with alcohol or chlorine-based disinfectants. It is essential to pay particular attention to the cleaning of all surfaces in contact with patients (for example, handles, reception desks, desks, etc.), which must be sanitized several times during the day.
- Remove tables, magazines, sketchbooks, games and in generally anything that could be contaminated by viruses and thus lead to further infections.

The Hearing Aid Professional needs to wear gloves and the client and any accompanying person needs to wash and/or disinfect their hands and wear gloves when they enter the hearing centre.

The following acts:

- Reception of defective or non-functioning hearing aids
- Verification and cleaning of hearing aids, earmolds, tubes and domes
- Handing over repaired or replacement hearing aids, without touching the patient.
- Verification of gain, output and functionality (in 2cc coupler, with listening stetoclip) and programming of hearing aids
- Provision of batteries, cleaning and maintenance products.
- Direct information, support, counselling by both the client adviser and the hearing aid professional
- Etc ...

can be executed, as long as a distance of more than 1 meter (social distancing – this is country-specific, see your local guidelines) is kept with the client.

The AEA European Hygiene Guidelines for all these acts must strictly be followed.

Steps where medical masks are essential

- **Step 4 – Inside the fitting room with medical face masks of at least class I (EN 14683:2014):**

After triage, the client and hearing aid professional can enter the fitting room at the condition they both disinfect their hands, wear gloves and wear a protective mask of at least class I (EN 14683:2014). Do not allow any accompanying person inside the fitting room. This type of mask prevents spreading the infection but does not guarantee protection against external infection. With these measures, you can execute all the necessary acts, as long as you strictly follow the AEA European Hygiene Guidelines.

- **Step 5 – Home visits with protective masks of at least class IIR (EN 14683:2014):**

We don't advise home visits at all, but this can be considered for highly urgent interventions. Avoid interventions for clients who are hospitalised or who are COVID-19 infected.

After triage, home visits (this is by definition an unsafe environment) are possible. The Hearing Care Professional needs to disinfect their hands and wear gloves and as mask class IIR (EN 14683:2014) and the client needs to wear gloves and a mask of at least class I. The AEA European Hygiene Guidelines must be strictly followed. If this personal protective equipment is not available, home visits cannot be executed.

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*For additional information and guidance, please only refer to official sources like the **World Health Organization**, dedicated section, the **AEA** (European Association of Hearing Aid Professionals) and **your Local Health Authorities**.*

- [The use of protective masks - WHO](#)
- [AEA Hygiene Protocol](#)
- [Infection control for Covid-19 - WHO](#)
- [European Commission Response Covid-19](#)

The guidelines are also available on the AEA website:

- [AEA Guidelines for Professional Hearing for COVID-19](#)