

Emerging Solutions: How to Keep You, Your Baby, and Your Provider Safe During COVID-19

It may bring comfort to know what specific things your provider (audiologist, pediatrician, early interventionist etc.) is doing to keep you and your baby safe. Your provider may also ask you to take certain steps to keep them and their staff safe. Many providers are calling families prior to their appointment to discuss safety.

“We went to the audiologist at our CI center last week and I’ve been VERY anxious about COVID. It was a VERY comfortable experience!!! The CI center called us when they were ready to re-open. They were very transparent about the new policies (masks, temp checks, etc.) and wanted me to know that I could cancel at the last minute if I wasn’t comfortable. There was no waiting room, only waiting in the vehicle was allowed. There were cones lined up in the parking lot with phone numbers and spot numbers on them. You let them know what spot you were parked at and they came out, with PPE on, with extra masks if we didn’t have any. They took our temperatures and asked us some questions. They gave us hand sanitizer and we went into the apt. LOTS of sanitizer was used by the audiologists and everything that was touched was thrown away or set aside for sterilization. We didn’t need to check out, everything was done over the phone after the apt. It was a LOVELY experience for this COVID-anxious mama!”

- Michelle Thomas, parent, Michigan

Staying Safe During Your Appointment

During the call from your provider, or a call begun by you, consider asking your provider:

1. If doing a screening only, do you have screening options other than us entering the building (ex. screening in car)?
2. If there is paperwork to be filled out, can you send it to me ahead of time?
3. When I arrive are there specific instructions (ex. phone you before I enter the building)?
4. Is there a limit to who can come to the appointment with me and my child?
5. Is there a limit to the number of people who can be in waiting area?
6. Are there health screenings (ex. take temperature) of patients upon arrival to your office?
7. How are public areas being cleaned (ex. waiting rooms, restrooms, food service areas) and how often?
8. How do you screen yourself or staff for wellness (ex. temperature)?
9. What protective gear (ex. gloves, masks) does the provider and his/her staff use?
10. How is equipment (ex. screening, diagnostic) cleaned or replaced between patients?
11. If you will be talking directly to my child, do you have a face mask with clear plastic so that my child can see your face/lips?
12. How can I help keep you and your staff safe?
 - a. Would you like me to wear a face mask?
 - b. Anything else?

If You Decide to Cancel or Reschedule Your Appointment

Even though your provider is taking steps toward safety, if you still do not feel comfortable with an in-person appointment, you may want to think about and/or take action in the following ways:

1. Have you talked to your provider about your safety concerns? Have you asked for additional safety strategies that would make you more comfortable to attend an appointment?
2. Would it help to talk to another parent who has recently had the experience of an in-person appointment?
3. If you plan to cancel or reschedule and you have an appointment scheduled, please call and let your provider know. Not showing up, impacts the schedule of the provider and his/her staff.
4. If you plan to reschedule your appointment:
 - a. Ask your provider how far out they are scheduled.
 - b. Have you balanced your concerns with safety with the amount of time that will pass until you are able to be seen by your provider?
 - c. Does the delay in going to the appointment impact the services your child needs?

RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources that may be helpful in identifying more questions and considerations.

- <https://www.healthyhearing.com/report/53087-Need-to-see-a-hearing-care-specialist-during-the-pandemic-things-to-keep-in-mind>
- <https://www.asha.org/News/2020/Early-Intervention-and-COVID-19-Advice-for-Parents-of-Children-Ages-0-3-Whose-Services-Are-Interrupted/>
- <https://handsandvoices.org/fl3/topics/fam-fam-support/need-support.html>
- <http://www.handsandvoices.org/fl3/topics/tipsheets.html>
- <http://www.infanthearing.org/COVID-19/index.html#support>