**Advice for blind and partially sighted people during coronavirus (COVID-19)**

**We’re sorry if this letter is difficult for you to read. We want you to know that there are organisations which can help you during this very difficult time and wanted to get in touch as soon as possible.**

**This letter is in large print - if you would prefer a different format, please let us know.**

We appreciate that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may be causing you many additional challenges so we’ve brought together some key contact numbers and advice on how to get support in your local community below. You’ll also find answers to the questions we’re being asked the most, but please don’t hesitate to call if you need help.

RNIB’s Helpline (0303 123 9999) has extended its opening hours. It is now open on weekdays (from 8am-8pm) and on Saturdays (from 9am-5pm). In addition to the usual help and advice on living with sight loss, our advisers can connect you to local support, and assist you in signing up to telephone and online groups that may offer a source of comfort in these times. Through the same number, you can also access pre-recorded information on the coronavirus and the Government’s response.

Also, Guide Dogs’ COVID-19 information line (0800 781 1444) is open on weekdays (from 9am-5pm). It supplies answers and information, for adults and families of children with sight loss, about living actively, independently and keeping well during the coronavirus outbreak. Whether you’re asking for yourself, a member of your family, or your child, both organisations offer online support and telephone services, and can help you access services from other providers.

**Finding local support in London**

Information on local organisations is available from both the RNIB Helpline and the Guide Dogs information line.

London has several local organisations who offer support, for example:

**London Vision** is a new sight loss charity for the capital. Current news, lockdown blogs and our newsletter are available online at [www.londonvision.org](http://www.londonvision.org) We are keen to hear from people at the current time so please get in touch on 020 3761 3651 or email info@londonvision.org

**Blind Aid** provide Community Sight Support services across the Boroughs of Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster. During this time the service is telephone based and can offer weekly telephone calls for emotional support and practical advice. Call 020 7403 6184 or email at enquiries@blindaid.org.uk

**Middlesex Association** cover the Boroughs of Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Enfield, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Haringey and Richmond providing a befriending service for those who are isolated or vulnerable. Call 020 8423 5141 if you need someone to speak to.

**Croydon Vision** provide information and advice for members by phone; support for essential shopping; befriending; technology support; a fortnightly newsletter as well as online events via Facebook. Call 020 8688 2486 or email at info@croydonvision.org.uk

**Sutton Vision** are providing an information and advice service; an increased telephone befriending service and are phoning Low Vision Clinic patients. Call 020 8409 7166 or email at info@suttonvision.org.uk

**Merton Vision** offer information and support; volunteers can help with essential shopping and collecting prescriptions. Call 020 8540 5446 or email at info@mertonvision.org.uk

**London Taxicard scheme**

Taxicard offers subsidised travel in licensed taxis and private hire vehicles (mini cabs) to London residents with serious mobility impairments or who are severely sight impaired.

In light of Covid-19, the following extension has been made to the Taxicard scheme.  Taxi drivers can pick up and deliver essential supplies for the scheme member or allow friends and family to travel on the card holders’ behalf for the same purpose.  Travel to medical appointments and collecting medication will also be allowed on the scheme.

The taxi booking number is 020 7763 5001.

To apply for a Taxicard call 020 7943 9791.

<https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/services/taxicard>

**Eye Health**

During this time, you may be concerned about attending eye clinic appointments. Hospitals have rearranged their clinics to reduce the risk and minimise contact with other patients and staff. You can always call the hospital to seek advice. If you have a sudden change in your vision or new symptoms, contact your optician or eye doctor immediately. It is important you seek help, please don’t ignore symptoms. Moorfields Eye Hospital are offering virtual appointments for patients using Attend Anywhere technology via smartphone, laptop or PC.

**Shopping for food and essentials**

Supermarkets are changing their delivery services to prioritise the needs of clinically vulnerable people, but we know many people are still struggling. The situation is changing daily and we are taking action to raise your concerns directly with the supermarkets. NHS volunteers across the UK are collecting essential supplies for people unable to leave the house. If you are worried we can help.

**Getting out and about**

Although social distancing can be difficult, it’s really important for your mental and physical health that you still go outside and get exercise. So, if you don’t live with someone who is able to guide you, think about using your cane to alert people to your sight loss when you go out. Alternatively, you can let others know of your proximity verbally and that you are unaware of exactly where they are.

**Keeping connected**

During this time, it’s especially important you stay connected with the outside world; whether it’s having Skype calls with family and friends, joining a Talk and Support group through the RNIB Helpline or signing up to a Keeping in Touch call with Guide Dogs. There are many sight loss forums available and most are open to your family and friends too. Having regular contact with people will help you to stay feeling positive.

If you also want to stay connected with the latest developments and information on coronavirus (COVID-19) and sight loss, listen to RNIB Connect Radio, the UK’s radio station for blind and partially sighted people. It’s available on Freeview 730 and online [www.rnibconnectradio.org.uk](http://www.rnibconnectradio.org.uk)

**Contact us**

RNIB’s Helpline (0303 123 9999) is open from 8am-8pm on weekdays and on Saturdays from 9am-5pm.

Guide Dogs’ COVID-19 information line (0800 781 1444) is open on weekdays (from 9am-5pm).

We know this is a difficult time and many people are feeling worried and isolated. These are just a few of the ways we can help you during this time - there is lots more advice for blind and partially sighted people available. So, please get in touch if we can help.

Stay safe.

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