



Hear Entendre Québec

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Hear Québec celebrates National AccessAbility Week by highlighting the importance of Clear Face Masks and shields.

(Montreal – May 31, 2020) –May 31 to June 6 marks **National AccessAbility Week** in Canada. This is a perfect time for businesses and the general public to take action and make accessibility a priority. With COVID-19 safety being everyone's top priority it is easy to forget that accessibility leads to greater safety for everyone.

“It is difficult for people with good hearing to decipher what people are saying behind masks during these times. Imagine how hard it is for individuals with hearing loss who rely on facial expressions and lipreading when they need to communicate!” - Heidi Wager, Hear Québec Executive Director.

Wearing face masks while communicating with those with hearing loss can lead to misinformation, confusion, anxiety, and even confidentiality being breached.

“There was a table in front of the prescription counter with a pharmacist on the other side behind a computer wearing a face mask and a face guard. I had a hard time hearing her asking me questions about my prescription. As someone with a hearing loss this was causing me anxiety. Her speech was muffled due to the gauze material of the mask and the distance. I rely on the hearing I have left with the help of hearing aids, but this was difficult. I am sure the situation would not be easy for hearing people as well. Also, I felt I had no privacy because there was a personal barrier that made me stay far away. The customer behind me can hear everything that was being said as the pharmacist had to speak up. Normally, I usually do not have any issues when I am at the pharmacy. I want to advocate for clear protective masks with no gauze material that affects speech and will also allow individuals with hearing loss to read lips if they rely solely on reading lips.” - Katrina Tarondo, Hear Québec Board member.

More than 33% of seniors suffer from age-related hearing loss and have been, and still are, the most vulnerable during COVID-19. 1 out of 4 Canadians live with some form of hearing loss (Canadian Hearing Society). Even before the pandemic this population was not thought about and left isolated. Add what is currently happening into the mix and it leads to sad and unethical times for these individuals. It is important to take proper care of this significant population.

In honor of National AccessAbility Week, Hear Québec wants you to look after the hearing loss community by being mindful of their needs and using a face shield instead of a face mask. You can also accommodate someone with hearing loss by removing your mask temporarily when speaking. Hear Québec has face shields available for people in need.

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ABOUT HEAR QUÉBEC: Hear Québec (formerly known as CHIP) is Montreal's only non-profit organization serving the English-speaking community with hearing loss. Hear Québec has been providing programs and services to those affected by hearing loss for 40 years. Hearing loss has been referred to time and time again as the invisible disability. Many people are also unaware of their own risk of becoming hard of hearing. Presentations about NIHL are just one of the many ways that Hear Québec is trying to make the world more hearing loss-friendly. aware and informed about hearing loss.