

Your rights to healthcare during coronavirus

Speak to the hospital learning disability nurse or safeguarding team if you are concerned that someone's needs are not being met. If you need help call the Learning Disability Helpline.

You can still ask for reasonable adjustments.

The Equality Act in England and Wales, and the Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland are still in force. This means you can still ask for reasonable adjustments to help you to access treatment. Many services are being run differently and the adjustments you usually ask for may be different at this time. For example, there is currently a ban on visitors in hospitals, however it may be a reasonable adjustment to allow someone with a learning disability to bring a carer with them (see below to find out more about visiting). Please also note the Welsh Learning Disability Care Pathway is still running in Wales.

You can ask to take someone with you if you need to go to hospital:

This may not always be possible due to infection control, but there are exceptions to the general bans on visitors for people with a learning disability and autism. For more details click on the links for [England](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and [Wales](#).

The Mental Capacity Act is still in force:

This means that everyone must still get the support they need to make decisions about their own care and treatment, and that if someone does not have capacity to make a particular decision, that decision must be decided in their best interests, with involvement from those closest to them. People who are assessed as not having capacity to make a particular decision still have the same rights to advocacy.

The care and treatment you are offered should be in your best interests:

Disability is not a valid reason to decide to withhold care and treatment, and you should never be asked to make a decision about your future care and treatment because of a lack of resources. If something doesn't feel right, speak up: in a hospital setting you can speak to the PALS team in England and Wales, or the Complaints Manager in Northern Ireland; you can also ask to speak to the learning disability or safeguarding lead. You can also call the Learning Disability Helpline for support.

Your rights to advocacy have not changed:

Advocacy services have had to change the way they work. In person visits may not be possible at the current time, but most services have found new ways to work. The changes to the Care Act have not changed any existing legal rights to advocacy in England and Wales.

Your urgent healthcare needs should still be met:

If you feel unwell, or have an accident, seek medical advice. Because of coronavirus, the way many services are run has changed. Some services and treatments have had to be put on hold, and others are finding new ways of working, for example by using video appointments. If you need medical advice call 111 in England and Northern Ireland, and 0845 46 47 in Wales (call 111 for coronavirus symptoms in Wales). In an emergency dial 999.

If you need support to manage long term health conditions or medication, for example for diabetes or epilepsy, you should still get the support you need, although it might be done differently at this time. If you have serious concerns about someone missing out the treatment or monitoring they need, call the community learning disability team, the hospital safeguarding team or learning disability lead, or speak to your GP. For more information and advice, and for help to raise your concerns, call the Learning Disability Helpline.

Remember if something does not feel right, or you are concerned that someone may miss out on the care they need in hospital, speak to the hospital safeguarding lead, the learning disability nurse, or call the Learning Disability Helpline. If you are in the community, speak to the community learning disability team, or call the Learning Disability Helpline.

Top tips

Make sure you know how to access a learning disability nurse:

At this time, most learning disability nurses are still working, although the way many do their jobs looks very different. Many are working from home, and contacting patients over the phone, and over the internet. Make sure you know how to contact your hospital learning disability nurse if you have one. If you need to go to hospital, try to contact them in advance so they can speak to the team.

Make sure your hospital passport is up to date:

Hospital passports are really important at the moment. The chances of any of us having to go to hospital are high, and despite the welcome changes to visitor guidance, there may be times when we are not able to be with our loved ones. A hospital passport can help communicate your loved ones needs and important information to the team treating them.

[Complete an emergency 'grab and go' guide](#) designed by NHS England: this will help communicate the really vital information to emergency teams.

How to contact the Learning Disability Helpline

In England

Call 0808 808 111 (Select option 1)

Email helpline@mencap.org.uk

In Wales

Call 0808 8000 300

Email helpline.wales@mencap.org.uk

Visit Learning Disability Wales for accessible info on COVID and updates from the Welsh Government <https://www.ldw.org.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-and-the-rights-of-disabled-people-in-wales/>

In Northern Ireland

Call 0808 808 1111 (Select option 2)

Email helpline.ni@mencap.org.uk

Links to useful documents in England

- [NHS England letter about safe decision making during COVID-19, including the appropriate use of advanced care planning and DNACPRs.](#)
- [This guide from NHS England tells healthcare professionals working in England how to meet the needs of people with a learning disability, including making reasonable adjustments.](#)

Links to useful documents in Wales

- [Mencap Cymru in partnership with Learning Disability Wales, All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers and All Wales People First are working to ensure up to date information on COVID policy and practise in Wales is kept in one place - you can find all current information here.](#)

- [This statement sets out the rights of disabled people in Wales during coronavirus](#)

Links to useful documents in Northern Ireland

- [This HSC COVID-19 guidance provides information on exceptions to visiting hospitals, e.g. including people with communication needs or challenging behaviour](#)
- [Information on hospital and people with disabilities](#)
- [The standard NI hospital passport is available here](#)
- [Visit NI Direct for information and updates on COVID-19 from the NI Executive](#)
- [The Northern Ireland Public Health Agency provide easy read information on COVID-19](#)