



**COVID-19 Update** **May 8, 2020**

**Show appreciation for direct care staff**

*The following appeared as a letter to the Editor published in the Altoona Mirror on 5/8/20.  
We couldn't say it better ourselves.*

I would like to pay tribute and show appreciation for all the direct care staff who have been tirelessly working through the pandemic.

Direct care staff are the frontline support for people with intellectual disabilities. In the best of times, they work long hours with people who have a wide range of needs, and have to be encouraging, caring and detail oriented.

During these trying times, they are still doing their usual duties but with the added risk of contracting the virus and possibly infecting their own families.

They are doing all that they can to keep the people they support healthy, engaged and having as much normalcy as possible. I sincerely regard the direct care staff (and the agencies who employ them) as frontline heroes.

They deserve the same praise and recognition that other essential workers are receiving.

If you know someone who works as a direct care staff, please thank them for all that they do for others. If you are a direct care staff, thank you.

Please continue to be involved, selfless and the support that others need to do the things that we take for granted every day.

Jeanna Bilek  
Hollidaysburg



**Happy Nurses Week 2020**

**May 6 – May 12**

2020 is Year of the Nurse! We recognize and appreciate our nurses across the RI DD System, and in all the hospitals, nursing homes, and visiting nurses. We appreciate your sacrifices on the frontline of a world health crisis.

**THANK YOU for all you do!**



## FINAL UPDATE: Self-Directed Hiring During COVID-19

Thank you for your patience while we researched the questions on self-directed hiring. The correct and final guidance is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, people who self-direct can hire any qualified adult, including family members, parents, and legal guardians.

All self-directed staff must be able to pass a background check. Typically, a background check must be completed before hire. Due to COVID, a variance is in place for the requirement of a background check. The variance requires the background checks to be done within 60 days of the end of the State of Emergency. Fiscal Intermediaries have been given guidance on performing background assessments in lieu of background checks during the State of Emergency.

### Census 2020



### The Count Continues!

Due to COVID-19,  
the U.S. Census Bureau has  
extended the self-response  
phase deadline to  
**October 31st**

#DisabilityCounts2020

There may be no disability-specific questions on the #2020Census, but that doesn't mean people with disabilities don't count.

Many of the supports and services we rely on to live in the community come from census data. Together let's make sure everyone is counted!

**We all count. Be counted in the #2020Census**

You can fill out your Census online at [my2020Census.gov](https://my2020census.gov) or you can complete it by phone by calling 844-330-2020.

**#DisabilityCounts2020**

## **Watch for COVID-19 Symptoms**

People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Some new symptoms have been identified. Symptoms may appear **2-14 days after exposure to the virus**. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell
- Nausea or Vomiting (less common)
- Diarrhea (less common)

### **Everyone can help stop the spread of viruses in Rhode Island.**

- ✓ Wash your hands often throughout the day. Use warm water and soap.
- ✓ If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- ✓ Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- ✓ Stay home and do not leave your house if you are sick, unless it is for emergency medical care.
- ✓ Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs spread this way.

## **What Mandatory Masks Means For You**

Effective Friday May 8 everyone in RI must wear face coverings when in a public place, both indoors and outdoors. The only exceptions from these rules are children under two years old and people whose health would be in jeopardy because of wearing a face covering. People with health conditions who cannot wear a mask are advised not to visit stores.

Employees of customer-facing businesses, office-based businesses and nonprofits, construction businesses, and manufacturers must wear cloth face coverings while at work. These businesses must provide face coverings for their employees. Face coverings can include scarves, bandanas and other homemade and non-factory-made masks.

Simple cloth face coverings are advised to slow the spread of the virus. Masks help people who may have the virus but not know it from transmitting it to others. A mask should:

- Fit snugly against the side of the face
- Be secured with ties or ear loops
- Include multiple layers of fabric
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Can be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape

When removing a mask, hold it by the ties or ear loops, not the mouth covering. Be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing it and immediately wash your hands. Wash and dry the mask. A washing machine should suffice in properly washing a face covering. If you need to wash masks by hand, lather masks with soap and scrub them for at least 20 seconds with hot water before tossing in the dryer. For peace of mind, iron masks on the cotton or linen setting to kill any remaining germs.

### **Does wearing a face mask mean I can stop social distancing?**

No. Cloth face coverings should be used with keeping 6-feet between yourself and others, washing your hands often, and disinfecting surfaces you touch often. Keeping space between you and others is one of the best ways to avoid being exposed to COVID-19.

## The Sherlock Center's COVID-19 Resources for SSI/SSDI Beneficiaries

<http://www.ric.edu/sherlockcenter/wicovid.html>

The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College has developed a list of resources related to COVID-19's impact on SSI and SSDI recipients. The list includes links to local and national resources, as well as 5 fact sheets created by the Sherlock Center. The fact sheets address the impact of the Stimulus Payment, Unemployment Insurance, Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) and Temporary Caregiver's Insurance for SSI/SSDI beneficiaries. Also on the page are links to the archived webinars and related handouts.

The Sherlock Center is a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). UCEDDs are evidence driven and designed to advance policies, practices and research that improve the health, education, social and economic well-being of people with disabilities, their families, and their communities.

## The Alliance for Citizen Directed Supports

<https://citizendirectedsupports.org/>

The Alliance for Citizen Directed Supports is an organization supporting people with disabilities who wish to take charge of their own lives through self-directing their services. We bring together those who self-direct their care with families, advocates, and organizations that promote and enable self-direction.



Membership is available to people, families, and organizations that support self-direction. We are an inclusive community that is not about one type of disability or identity, but instead, is about uniting all those with a shared commitment that everyone should be in charge of their own lives.

Visit their COVID-19 Resource page at <https://citizendirectedsupports.org/resources/> and check out their other great resources on self-direction, supported decision-making, and other topics.

## The Center for Advanced Palliative Care's COVID-19 Resources

The Center for Advanced Palliative Care's COVID-19 rapid response resources are temporarily being made available to non-members. One of these resources is the **Planning Steps for Patients & Families During the COVID-19 Crisis** tip sheet to help families plan ahead in the event they become ill and make their care wishes known. It was adapted by the National Patient Advocate Foundation from the PREPARE for Your Care program. It is attached to this bulletin.

There is a companion video to the 'Planning Steps' guide called **Caregiving During COVID: Three Good Things To Do**, which can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/403367228> where VitalTalk co-founder Dr. Tony Back speaks to caregivers about how they can be prepared in the event that they or their loved one becomes ill.

Visit the CAPC site for more resources at: <https://www.capc.org/toolkits/covid-19-response-resources/>

## Food Assistance

Many Rhode Islanders are experiencing food insecurity for the first time as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. They may never have sought food assistance through the network of food pantries and meal sites. At the member agencies of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, all are welcome. Guests must wear masks or face coverings when receiving food from any program.

Use the RI Community Food Bank's Find Food list at <https://rifoodbank.org/find-food/>. They offer a list of locations as well as a search using a map. This list is updated regularly to reflect changes in food assistance programs in response to COVID. Please call ahead to confirm a program is still open during their regularly listed hours. You can also reach out to United Way of Rhode Island by calling 2-1-1 from any phone (*note: there is usually a few second delay, so don't hang up, someone will answer*), or visit them online at [www.211ri.org](http://www.211ri.org).

### Where to Find Fresh Produce if you use SNAP

- 1. Project Hands Up**  
15 Factory St, West Warwick  
Open 1-3 Tuesdays and Thursdays  
Drive up only  
*They get donations of produce from Whole Foods and Trader Joes*
- 2. Saint Vincent DePaul**  
Call (401) 490-0822 x4  
Please call for information
- 3. Farm Fresh RI**  
Call (401) 312-4250  
Will deliver fresh fruits/vegetables to your door  
*Offering SNAP recipients double the amount. For example, spend \$10, get \$20 worth of vegetables and fruits.*
- 4. Local Community Action Programs (CAP)**  
See list below. Call your local CAP for more information.

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**Blackstone Valley Community Action Program**  
32 Goff Ave, Pawtucket, RI 02860  
401-723-4520 or [www.bvcap.org](http://www.bvcap.org)  
Serving: Pawtucket, Central Falls, Lincoln, Cumberland, Woonsocket

**Community Action Partnership of Providence**  
518 Hartford Ave, Providence, RI 02909  
401-273-2000 or [www.cappri.org](http://www.cappri.org)  
Serving: Providence

**Community Care Alliance**  
PO Box 1700, Woonsocket, RI 02895  
401-235-7000 or [www.CommunityCareRI.org](http://www.CommunityCareRI.org)  
Serving: Woonsocket

**Comprehensive Community Action**  
311 Doric Ave, Cranston, RI 02910  
401-467-9610 or [www.comcap.org](http://www.comcap.org)  
Serving: Cranston, Foster, Scituate, Coventry

**Westbay Community Action Partnership**  
224 Buttonwoods Ave, Warwick, RI 02886-7558  
401-732-4660 or [www.westbaycap.org](http://www.westbaycap.org)  
Serving: Warwick, West Warwick, East Greenwich

**Eastbay Community Action - Lower Bay Region**  
19 Broadway, Newport, Rhode Island 02840  
401- 847-7821 or [www.ebcap.org](http://www.ebcap.org)  
Serving: Newport, Portsmouth, Tiverton, Middletown, Jamestown, Little Compton

**Eastbay Community Action - Upper Bay Region**  
100 Bullocks Point Ave, Riverside, RI 02915  
401-437-1000 or [www.ebcap.org](http://www.ebcap.org)  
Serving: East Providence, Warren, Bristol, Barrington

**Tri-County Community Action Agency - North**  
1126 Hartford Ave, Johnston, RI 02919  
401-351-2750 or [www.tricountyri.org](http://www.tricountyri.org)  
Serving: North Providence, Johnston, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Burrillville, Gloucester

**Tri-County Community Action Agency - South**  
1935 Kingstown Rd, Wakefield, RI 02879  
401-789-3016 or [www.tricountyri.org](http://www.tricountyri.org)  
Serving: Exeter, Charlestown, Narragansett, Westerly, Hopkinton, North Kingstown, South Kingstown, Richmond, West Greenwich, New Shoreham

## **Check In and Speak Up: Survey for Individuals with I/DD**

Advocates in Action (AinA) designed a questionnaire with a team of Self-Advocates who receive services through the RI DD System, but any Rhode Islander who has a developmental disability is welcome to answer the questions.

AinA will use your answers to figure out how to help during these challenging and uncertain times. They also plan to share the results with the RI Division of Developmental Disabilities and other allies. The combined results of what everyone gives for answers can help guide the people who are developing Rhode Island's emergency response to the pandemic for the DD Community. In other words, you can help make sure that they hear from individuals as they work on policies and make some important decisions in the days and weeks ahead.

You can find the questionnaire at <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/oksurvey.php> or if you need help taking the survey call Advocates in Action at (877) 532-5543.

### **Silver Linings**

*This is a section we're adding to highlight some of the good things going on in the midst of all the difficulties right now. If you have anything you'd like to share, please send it to [BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov](mailto:BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov) with the subject: Silver Linings.*

The worst of situations always has an uncanny ability to bring out the best in people. Some are shopping for those that can't, others are leading drive-by cheer ups for those in need. For Matt helping to distribute masks to people in the South County area is his personal mission.

Matt is an active member of his community, having many friends in the area. Carol-Ann, a friend of Matt's for over six years, started sewing masks for family and friends. Knowing that not everyone has access to or the ability to sew masks, Matt asked Carol-Ann how he could help. Carol-Ann asked Matt to find material and distribute the masks that she makes.

"I felt that it would be a good idea to distribute masks to people in need, whether it's the fire department, (where Matt volunteers), friends or anyone," Matt said proudly.

Matt went to Job Lot to pick up supplies, as he knew that they are donating material so people can make masks. Matt delivered the donation to Carol-Ann to make masks and delivered over 50 masks to people in the South County area.

"I would give people a pickup time and location and they would meet me there," Matt said describing his mask delivery process. "People are very thankful that my friend has been making masks and that I'm able to deliver them for free."

Matt is always wearing his gloves and his own mask when out making deliveries. He makes sure to practice social distancing with those to whom he delivers the masks.

"I make sure that I wear personal protective equipment where it's always needed," Matt said. "This is important so no spreads symptoms to anyone else."

Matt will continue to get material and deliver masks for as long as there is a need. He has become an unsung hero in his community, willing to help anyone that asks. "It's a good thing to be able to help people out and help them stay safe during this crisis," Matt said.

- Thank you to Living Innovations for sharing Matt's story!

## If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, BH Link is here for you

BH Link's mission is to ensure all Rhode Islanders experiencing mental health and substance use crises receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible in an environment that supports their recovery. Call 911 if there is risk of immediate danger. Visit the BH Link website at [www.bhlink.org](http://www.bhlink.org) or for confidential support and to get connected to care:

CALL (401) 414-LINK (5465)

If under 18 CALL: (855) KID(543)-LINK(5465)

Visit the 24-HOUR/7-DAY TRIAGE CENTER at 975 Waterman Avenue, East Providence, RI

## Stay Informed with Information on COVID-19

### Rhode Island Department of Health COVID-19 Resources

Hotline (401) 222-8022 or 211 after hours;  
Email [RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov](mailto:RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov)  
Website <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>

### Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Information

Website [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus)  
Videos <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/videos.html>  
*Includes a link to ASL videos*

### BHDDH Information on COVID-19's Impact on DD Services and the DD Community

Website [bhddh.ri.gov/COVID](http://bhddh.ri.gov/COVID)

### RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Website <https://ripin.org/covid-19-resources/>  
Call Center (401) 270-0101 or email [callcenter@ripin.org](mailto:callcenter@ripin.org)

### Advocates in Action – for videos and easy to read materials

Website <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>  
*Website offers BrowseAloud, which will read the website to you*

## Sign Up for Our Email List

If you aren't receiving email updates and newsletters from the Division, you can sign up on our website. From the main BHDDH page at [bhddh.ri.gov](http://bhddh.ri.gov), select **What's New**, then go to bottom and click on **DD Community Newsletter**. The link to sign up for the BHDDH Newsletter is directly below the title, as shown in the picture at right.

DD Community Newsletter  
[SIGN UP FOR THE BHDDH NEWSLETTER](#)

## Contacting the Division

The department is working on a reduced workforce and therefore calls should not be placed directly to your social caseworker. DDD has put 24-hour phone coverage in place with a central business hour phone number and an on-call number for nights and weekends.

If you have a vital need, please call the numbers below. If you have any general questions or concerns, please email them if you can, in order to try to leave the phone lines free for those who need to call. We will do our best to address your questions directly or through future newsletters.

AM **M T W Th F** PM  
**401-462-3421**

8:30 AM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 4:00 PM

**WEEKDAYS DURING BUSINESS HOURS FOR:**

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**
- **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR DD SERVICES**

During business hours  
 (Monday-Friday 8:30-4:00),  
 for questions or support  
**(401) 462-3421**

PM **M T W Th F** PM  
**401-265-7461**

4:00 PM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 10:00 PM

**AFTER HOURS ON WEEKDAYS FOR:**

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

For emerging or imminent care  
 related questions,  
 Mon - Fri 4pm-10pm and  
 weekends 8:30am-10pm  
**(401) 265-7461**

AM **SAT SUN** PM  
**401-265-7461**

8:30 AM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 10:00 PM

**ON WEEKENDS FOR:**

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

**E-MAIL THE DIVISION**

**BHDDH.AskDD@BHDDH.RI.GOV**

HELP US KEEP THE PHONE LINES OPEN FOR THOSE WHO ARE CALLING WITH A VITAL NEED!

**WHEN POSSIBLE, PLEASE SEND AN E-MAIL FOR:**

- **NON-CRITICAL CONCERNS** about Your Services and Supports
- **GENERAL QUESTIONS** about Your Services or the RI DD System

Send general questions to the  
 AskDD email address. Please  
 do not email critical issues.  
[BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov](mailto:BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov)

**911**

**FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES  
 CALL 911  
 RIGHT AWAY. DON'T WAIT!**

For medical or  
 healthcare related  
 emergencies, call  
 your Primary Care

**CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR**

**CALL FOR:**

- ROUTINE Healthcare Questions
- NON-EMERGENCY Medical Care

**FOLLOW YOUR DOCTOR'S ADVICE**  
**DON'T go to their office unless they tell you to!**

# SELF-DIRECTED SUPPORTS NETWORK

A NETWORK OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILY MEMBERS USING SELF-DIRECTED SUPPORTS IN RHODE ISLAND

ONLINE MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2020  
6:30 – 8:00 PM

This meeting will take place online using Zoom. When you RSVP, you will receive an email with the directions and a password to join the meeting. You can connect by computer, mobile device or listen using your telephone. You may be prompted to download an app depending on the device you plan to use.

The Self-Directed Supports Network is a resource for individuals and families using self-directed supports through the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Meetings provide an opportunity to share experiences and learn from others.

## PLAN TO ATTEND IF YOU ARE:

- A family member or person **considering** self-directed supports.
- A family member or person **new** to self-directed supports.
- A family member or person **experienced** at using self-directed supports.

## JOIN THE DISCUSSION!

- Surviving the Corona crisis.
- Designing a new plan to support what you need.
- Recruiting and keeping good staff.

RSVP LINK: [HTTPS://BIT.LY/3AMF3RF](https://bit.ly/3AMF3RF)

Please RSVP using the link above. Click the link or cut and paste into your browser. Soon after you RSVP, you will receive an email confirmation with complete details and directions for using Zoom. If you need a reasonable accommodation (e.g. ASL Interpreter, large print) or information in a language other than English, please make your needs known when you RSVP.



For questions, call or email Claire Rosenbaum, Sherlock Center on Disabilities:  
Email: [crosenbaum@ric.edu](mailto:crosenbaum@ric.edu) Voice: 401-456-4732 TTY: 711

# For Everyone's Health and Safety

A Face Covering or Mask **MUST** Be Worn Here—At All Times.



- ✓ **Face coverings help prevent illnesses like COVID-19 from spreading to others while speaking, coughing, or sneezing.**
- ✓ **Your face covering can be a scarf, bandana, or a homemade mask.**
- ✓ **It should cover your mouth AND your nose.**

#### **FACE COVERINGS OR MASKS SHOULD NOT BE WORN BY:**

- ✗ **Anyone whose health would be harmed from wearing a face covering.**
- ✗ **Infants, babies, or children under 2 years old.**

As of April 14, 2020: Customers and employees must wear face coverings, per Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo's Executive Order 20-24.



For more information: [health.ri.gov/covid](https://health.ri.gov/covid)

ATTENTION:

# Wheelchair and Assistive Technology Users

## PRECAUTIONS for COVID-19

Greetings from Beneficial Designs. My name is Peter Axelson. I am a wheelchair user, designer, and engineer, and I am reaching out today with important information regarding COVID-19 precautions to be taken by wheelchair users.

In the 1970s, James Robb, MD, was one of the first molecular virologists in the world to study coronaviruses. Dr. Robb has shared an important email correspondence on how this virus can spread. According to Robb, the virus spreads in droplets through coughing and sneezing. He cautions that surfaces where these droplets land are infectious for about a week, on average. It is important to remember that direct contact with an infected surface does not guarantee the spread of infection, so long as you continuously wash your hands and keep them away from your face.

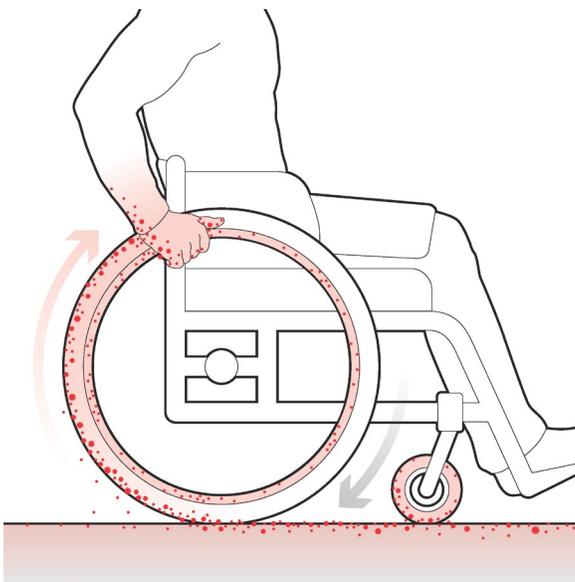
**If you push a manual wheelchair or use other types of assistive technology (AT), there are unique precautions you should take related to hand washing. COVID-19 can survive on the surfaces of your wheelchair or AT which you come in frequent contact with, such as the handrims. Any virus that might be on your hands is transferred to your handrims as you push your wheelchair.**

### Clean Hands

**Washing your hands** is incredibly important. Wet and wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, following the [CDC guidelines](#)<sup>1</sup> whenever you return home from ANY activity that involves locations where other people have been.

Using a fingernail brush to clean under your fingernails is a good idea for those of us that have really rough skin from pushing our wheelchairs for so many years.

I have been a manual wheelchair user for over 40 years, since I broke my back at the Air Force Academy during a training exercise. Because my hands are always touching the handrims on my wheelchair, I use anti-bacterial wet wipes to clean my hands before eating. Using hand wipes prior to meals, regardless of where I am, has reduced the amount of colds and flu I have contracted over the past 20 years. I generally do not touch the tires on my wheelchair, as I use flexible ergonomic handrims which provide a great grip without requiring hand-to-tire contact.



*Tires transfer the virus to the hands and your hands transfer the virus to the handrims.*

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fprevention.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprepare%2Fprevention.html)

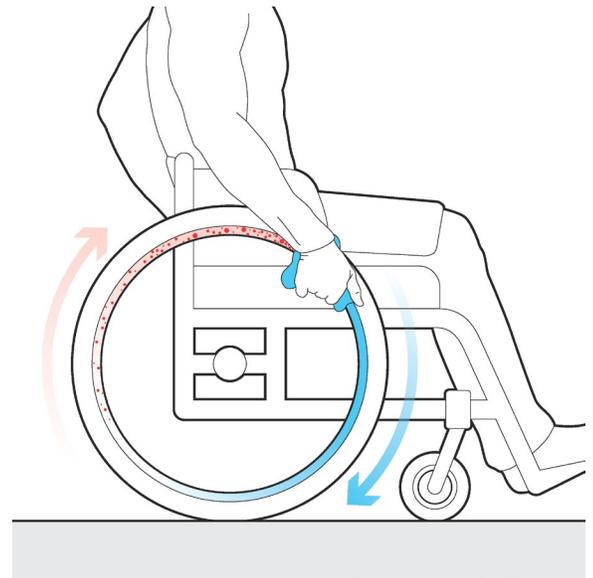
In addition, if you push on your tires, you are basically touching everywhere you have rolled. Wearing gloves when pushing is another option to keeping your hands cleaner. However, if you wear gloves you might need to think about where you set them, as they may now be infected with a virus. It is also likely that the inside of your gloves may become infected unless you always wash your hands before putting the gloves on.

## Clean Wheelchair

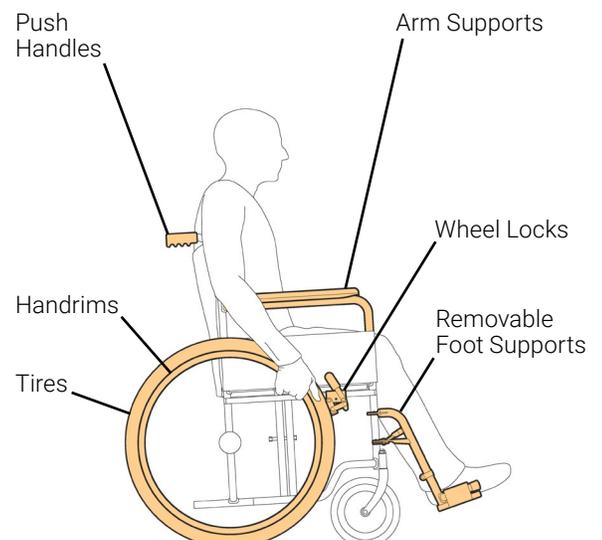
**Washing the surfaces on your wheelchair** is an important practice. All solid surfaces that we touch could potentially have viruses on them. The handrims and tires on your wheelchair are solid surfaces. At home, when I wash my hands, I have two washcloths or anti-bacterial wipes available. After I wet my hands, apply soap, and then wash my hands, I get two washcloths or paper towels wet with some soap and push my wheelchair around the house, sliding the wash cloths on the handrims as I go. I push my chair about 20 ft (6 m), or spin around in circles if I am in a public bathroom. Pushing 20 ft (6 m) wipes the handrims three times. It can be a bit tricky to learn how to do this. You can have someone slowly push you to make it easier. This allows me to clean the handrims on my wheelchair. I recommend a similar technique for cleaning your wheels; push the wheelchair around with the washcloths on the tires.

While I'm at it, I also wipe the other surfaces that I regularly touch on my wheelchair; including the wheel locks, and the frame in front of my seat cushion. If you have arm supports, push handles or removable foot supports they should be cleaned as well. If you use a powered wheelchair, disinfect your joystick and controls and anything else that you regularly touch on your chair. Remember that many plastics could react poorly to a cleaner containing bleach.

As long as you properly wash your hands before getting into your wheelchair, it can be helpful if someone else washes your tires and handrims while you are not using the chair. I also regularly clean grab bars and other surfaces that I touch in my home when making transfers into or out of my wheelchair. If you do not clean your wheelchair or AT **after washing your hands you will re-infect your hands** with the virus that might be on the handrims or other surfaces that you touch. In case you might have touched part of your uncleaned wheelchair or AT during the cleaning process, it might be a good idea to wash your hands again afterwards.



*Pushing the chair with a wet cloth with soap will clean your handrims.*



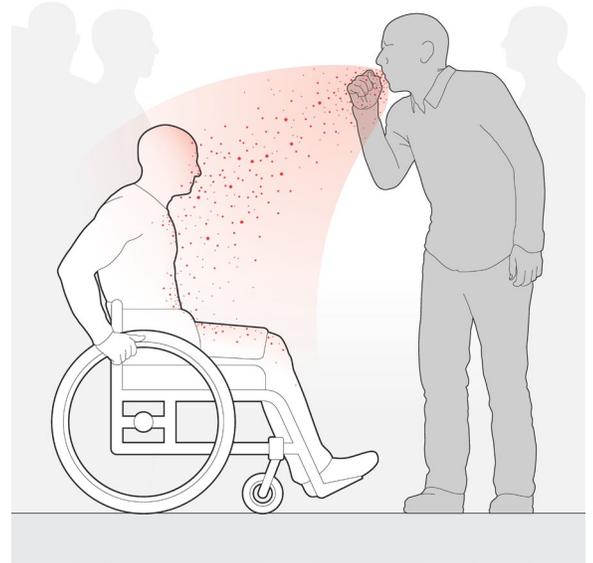
*Make sure to wipe down all surfaces on your wheelchair that you or others regularly touch.*

## Social Distance

### **There is also the matter of social distancing.**

Because wheelchair users tend to sit lower than most people that are standing, we can experience more exposure to saliva droplets when talking to people taller than us. Many medical professionals have recommended observing a minimum of 6 ft (2 m) of distance to those around you to alleviate this risk.

You may also consider wearing some type of face mask to protect yourself from getting “sprayed” by people talking to you. Medical face masks are in high demand right now, and not easy to get hold of. I have a face mask that I wear skiing on really cold days; it would catch any unintentional spraying of saliva from someone’s speech, sneeze or cough. A virus could go through the mask since it is not an N95-rated mask, however, my ski mask might be better than no protection at all. A face mask would also keep me from touching my mouth and nose, further preventing infection. It is important to limit hand-to-face contact as much as possible. Personally, I keep a cup of paint-stir sticks on my desk that I use to scratch my face when I have an itch.



*Wheelchair users sit lower and are more vulnerable to infected saliva droplets and aerosols.*

### **To Recap:**

1. Wash your hands with soap often and wipe them with anti-bacterial wipes just before and after you eat.
2. Wipe down your wheelchair (especially push rims, tires, and joysticks) or other AT with a wet cloth with soap or anti-bacterial wipe.
3. Observe a minimum of 6 ft (2 m) of distance from others in social interactions, and consider the benefits of wearing a face mask, medical or otherwise.

**We have a responsibility to ourselves and others** to act in accordance with medical authority suggestions for preventing the spread of disease. By following these additional suggestions, as wheelchair users, we can all do our best to limit the spread of the virus and enable healthier environments for ourselves and those we come in contact with. I hope this advice can be of use and provide additional comfort in knowing the specific precautions that can be taken by wheelchair and AT users. This is an extraordinary trial we are going through. These precautions mean that it will take you much longer to practice appropriate hygiene than it will for everyone else. If you are alive and pushing a manual wheelchair independently, you have already proven to yourself that you have the perseverance to continue living your life. Do not give up because of a virus. Just because you use a wheelchair, and there is a new virus spreading around, you do not need to live your life in fear. Be courageous, and push forward.

**Peter Axelson MSME, ATP, RET**

Manual wheelchair user and leader of Beneficial Designs