

Covid-19: Supporting your blind and partially sighted customers

Guidance for restaurants, pubs and cafes



Introduction

As lockdown begins to ease, we want to support your staff in helping customers in “vulnerable situations” by offering some simple guidance. This will not only support your customers with sight loss but help to dramatically improve the overall customer experience.

Everyone sees differently. This ranges from people with perfect sight (or so-called “20/20 vision”) to those who see darkness or nothing at all. That said, 93 per cent of people who are registered blind or partially sighted can see something, which can come as a surprise to the general public.



Information

As restaurants, pubs and cafés begin to reopen, providing up-to-date information about any provisions being put in place is key. It is important to share what physical changes you are making within your environment, as well as policy changes, so customers have some idea of what to expect. This could include floor indicators, protective screens, temporary signage, booking processes and changes to layouts/one-way systems. Not everyone will be able to see these, so try to share this information across your channels.

If there is temporary signage displayed to advise on layout, policy changes or opening times, try to ensure that the smallest print used is in size 14 font at least – hand-written notes can be difficult for everyone to read. But, where you can, verbalise these changes to your customers on arrival.

Visual indicators and awareness

It's important to remember that blind and partially sighted people don't necessarily "look blind". Not all blind and partially sighted people wear dark glasses, have a cane or a guide dog, so be mindful that it may not always be obvious. If you think that someone might require assistance or they have a visual indicator (which includes wearing the sunflower lanyard), a simple introduction and "Is there anything I can assist you with?", can be a huge help.

Social distancing From our research, we found that almost two thirds of blind or partially sighted people say they've found maintaining a social distance difficult – guide dogs are amazing animals, but they are unaware that social distancing is in place. Please keep this in mind when endorsing social distancing within your establishment.

Customer-facing staff Introduce yourself as customers may not see your uniform/name tag. For example, when meeting and greeting a simple, "Hi I'm Steve, your waiter, do let me know if there is anything I can do to help" can go a long way. Also, it is key at this point to verbally highlight any changes in policy or environment in case your customers can't see them.

As many establishments are now providing an "at seat service", in addition to your introduction, try to remember to describe where you place any food or drink, for instance:

"I'm just putting your drink on your left-hand side".

For more information on how to interact with your blind and partially sighted customers, please refer to our "Helping you to help your customers" resource.

Hi I'm Steve, your waiter, how can I help?



Establishment and customer experience

Outdoor service

You may be thinking about using your furniture outside to help your customers to socially distance. Please consider how you set out and communicate these changes to blind and partially sighted people so that they know where any new furniture is and how they will be able to navigate this space.

More information can be found in the new Government pavement guidance: www.gov.uk/government/publications/pavement-licences-draft-guidance Pavement Licences (outdoor seating proposal), which describes the considerations and use of furniture, such as keeping a minimum of 1.5 metres between any obstacle and the edge of the footway. It also mentions using a suitable barrier to separate and define the area.

Test and trace requirements: signing in/registering

Many establishments will be trialling new processes to comply with the NHS' Test and Trace programme. As these are likely to still be in development – and therefore potentially inaccessible – where applicable, please offer support to blind and partially sighted customers and visitors in completing any new registration processes you have implemented.

Guiding

We know that sticking to government guidelines and social distancing is very important at this time, but our research shows that 48% of blind or partially sighted people are concerned or anxious about following social distancing guidance correctly. Guiding someone who is blind or partially sighted to a seat for example, in the “traditional way”, is not currently an option.

Therefore, if someone requires guiding, and there is not a safe and comfortable way in which social distancing measures can be adhered to, verbal guiding may have to be considered.

Colour contrast

When creating temporary signage, please be mindful of how these appear with your interior lighting conditions and ensure there is clear colour contrast – as otherwise blind and partially sighted customers may not be able to read it. Also, try to add this same logic to any online content you create.

Tactile markers and audio announcements

We support the use of safe tactile indicators or markers and audible announcements to provide your customers with information in non-visual forms. For example, using tactile floor markers when queuing to enter and be seated in an establishment or waiting for the toilet.

Menus and apps

We are aware that many restaurants, pubs and cafés will provide single-use menus. Providing alternative formats such as Braille and large print is key, but we are aware due to hygiene measures, these menus may not be available. Therefore, the accessibility of apps and websites as is imperative if they are offered as alternatives.

If an app or website is not available, or the individual is unable to access the menu, your customer-facing staff could offer to read the menu instead.

Hygiene

On arrival, please highlight to your blind and partially sighted customers any hygiene measures that are in place and indicate where they can sterilise their hands. These may not always be obvious.

Protective screens

With the installation of protective screens, it's important to ensure there is good contrast so they don't create unnecessary confusion. This can be as simple as putting tape around the edge of the screen and any payment terminal location.

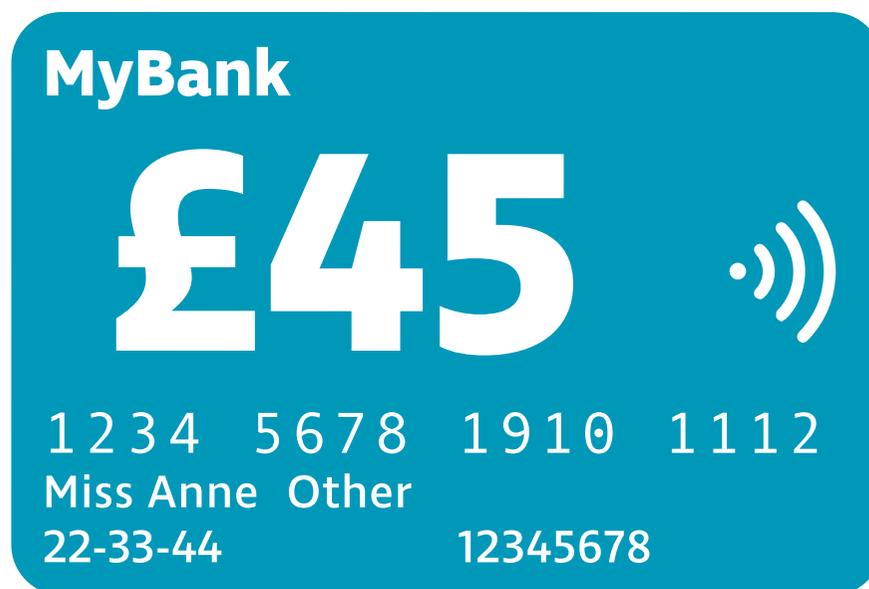
Payment

We support the use of contactless payment and the increased £45 limit, along with smart device payments. However, for those that need to use cash, be aware that this may be the only form of payment that is suitable for them at this time.

Innovative accessible solutions

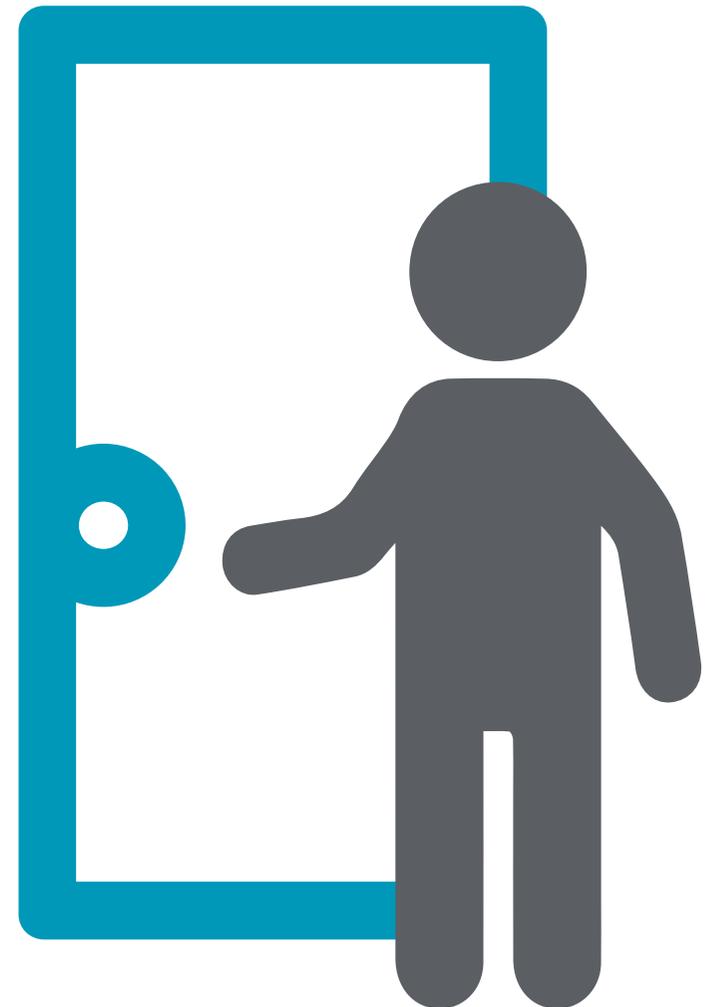
We know many businesses are exploring how to better support their customers with innovative ways of delivering information; such as the ability to order and pay at the table. We support the use of technology in achieving this and we are here to help you ensure the accessibility and inclusive nature of any solution.

For more information on how we can support you, please email BusinessLink@rnib.org.uk



Home delivery

If your business provides a delivery service, when dropping a delivery at the door of a blind or partially sighted customer, make sure you step back, introduce yourself and let the customer know where you have placed the item. Using specific language, such as: "Your pizza is on the floor to your left in the porch" will be far easier for someone to understand than "It's there" and pointing.



Online, social media and video content

With the ever-changing landscape, it's vital that we maintain the accessibility of websites, apps, social and all other media content. In a time of change, good practices can easily be broken, resulting in customers being excluded from important information and updates.

Remember, maintaining accessibility can be the difference between successfully making your order or not.

When making video content, it is also key to consider that the audio narrative does not rely on the visuals within your content. So, if you create a video, try and see if you get all the information just by listening.

Find advice on accessible information on our website at:
<https://t.co/5DN8rzlY6x?amp=1>



RNIB Business Services

RNIB Business Services work with key partners to deliver inclusive, accessible and usable solutions for blind and partially sighted people. The commercial services we provide to our clients are delivered on a for-profit basis and these profits are then used to help fund our charitable activities.

We support industry sectors with consultancy and business-as-usual services, such as fulfilment of alternative format transcription through our state of the art, secure facility. This engagement ranges from financial services, travel and transport, retail, leisure and health sectors. We can assist with evaluations on the accessibility of websites and apps, documents, products, ensuring an accessible more inclusive customer experience.

If you would like information on all our services, visit our Business Services section of our website or email our team at **BusinessLink@rnib.org.uk** or call **01733 375370**

For more information, please visit:
rnib.org.uk

Standing with you
through every
challenge

