

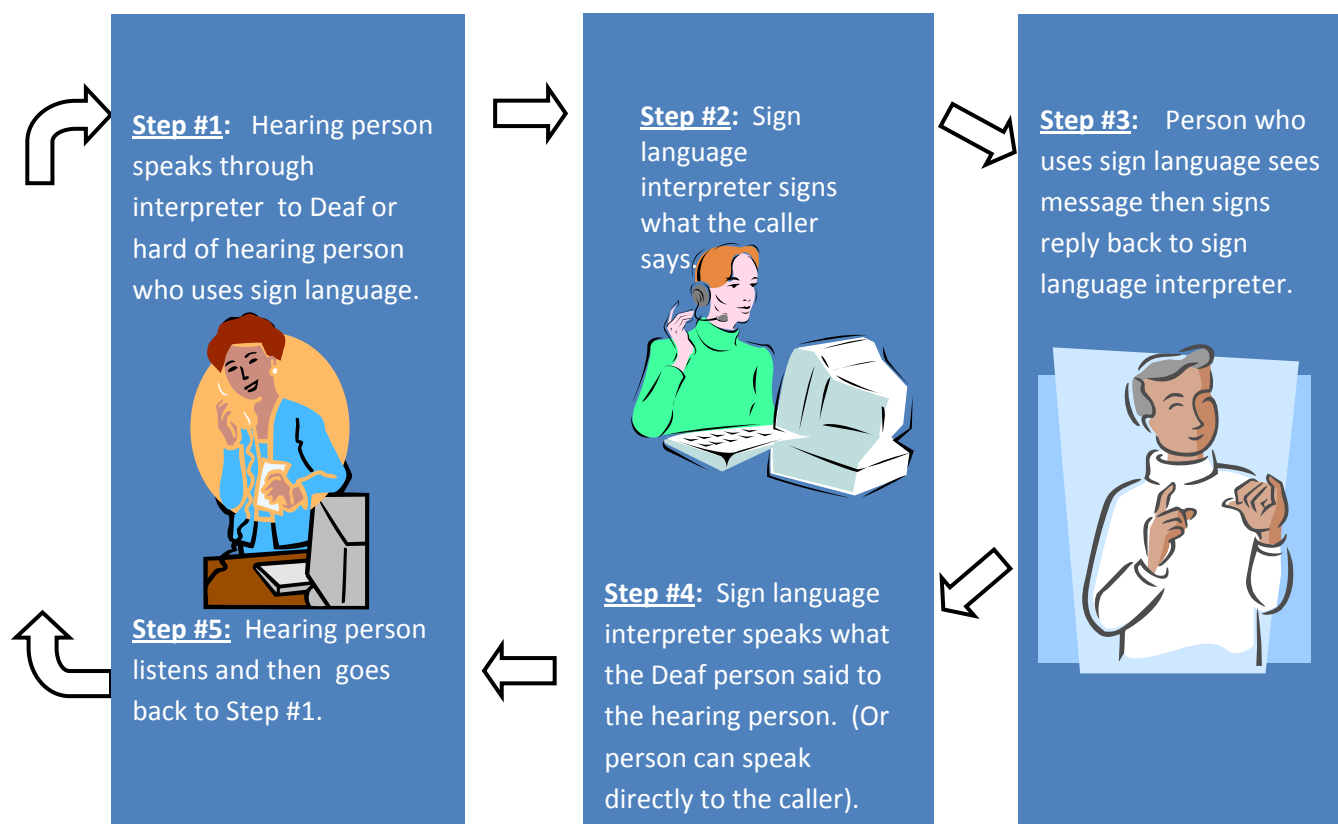
Video Relay Service (VRS)

What is the video relay service (VRS)?

VRS is a telecommunication service for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who use sign language as their primary language. VRS enables anyone to conduct video relay calls through a certified sign language interpreter via a computer with high-speed Internet connection and a webcam or a videophone and a TV. The Deaf user sees an interpreter on their screen and signs to the interpreter, who then places a call to a hearing person via a standard phone line and relays the conversation between both parties. Communication using VRS is instantaneous and natural. It can be a useful tool for health care providers to communicate with their patients who use sign language.

How can health care providers use VRS?

To use VRS, the health care provider calls a number provided by the patient and talks to the patient through a sign language interpreter by phone. The sign language interpreter communicates with the patient in sign language through a webcam. When they have finished their conversation, they simply hang up.



Some Deaf people can speak for themselves but use the interpreter to interpret what the person on the other end of the line is saying because they cannot hear well enough to understand what they are saying. This is called a voice carry over call.

How do people who are Deaf prefer to communicate?

Sign language is considered the “native” language of people who are Deaf, and it is more natural for them to communicate in sign language than in writing (such as through TTY or e-mail). Also, communicating with the health care provider in their own language through the VRS allows more independence for the patient and gives them the ability to make their own medical decisions rather than having the information conveyed through a family member.

Why should a health care provider use VRS?

VRS is an efficient and low-cost alternative to TTY or TDD (Teletypewriter, or Telecommunication Device for the Deaf), e-mail, or communicating through a family member. VRS is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. VRS is accessible and widely used by the Deaf population.

What equipment is needed to place a VRS call?

There is no special equipment needed by the health care provider’s office (as opposed to the TTY system, which requires a special TTY phone). Therefore, there is no extra cost to the health provider other than regular charges associated with calls.

What about privacy/confidentiality?

Confidentiality is an important health care issue, and patients/providers may be worried that privacy is being violated by talking through a third party. Accommodation services are covered by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), so confidentiality is protected. Interpreters have been trained to abide by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf/National Association of the Deaf Code of Ethics and the Federal Communication Commission’s regulations regarding consumer rights to privacy and confidentiality. Interpreters also are monitored for compliance toward the VRS provider’s policy of confidentiality. With these precautions taken, video relay service may be even more private and secure than e-mail.

What if the person does not answer?

Many VRS companies offer “signmail,” which allows the interpreter to leave a message in sign language for the person via a webcam to retrieve just as a hearing person would retrieve voice mail.



Is there any certain etiquette involved in using this service?

Do not use “tell him/her...” or “will he/she...?” This etiquette is inappropriate for a conversation. This is a regular conversation in a different way. Approach the conversation as you would with a family member, close friend, or any other type of conversation. It is polite to identify yourself at the beginning of the call, but not required. Relay agents are not permitted to engage in conversations unless it is for specific call processing reasons (i.e. requesting a number to dial, providing status on a call, etc.).

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