

HEARING AUSTRALIA - World-first solution for face masks effects on speech

National Acoustics Laboratories releases hearing aid solution that overcomes effects of face masks on speech

The National Acoustics Laboratories (NAL) has developed a solution to a challenge faced by hearing aid users worldwide in 2020 - the impact of face mask use on their understanding of speech. NAL, the research division of Hearing Australia, has issued recommendations for audiologists across the world on how best to adjust hearing aids to counter the effect of face masks for people who use hearing aids.

“Face masks are a powerful tool against the spread of COVID-19 but they also soften speech sounds,” says Dr Brent Edwards, NAL Director.

“NAL’s recommendations are designed to help hearing aid users worldwide communicate with people wearing masks. Now that we can share our evidence-based solution, we anticipate it will have implications nationally and internationally, which is most exciting.”

Evaluation, involving computational models of speech and hearing as well as laboratory speech tests, has proven that the adjustments help hearing aid users understand speech just as well as when the speaker is wearing a mask as when they are not. NAL’s solution details specific adjustments that can be made to any type of hearing aid to counter the effect of different types of face masks on speech sounds.

It follows extensive research into the effect of face mask use on speech understanding and how best to counter it.

Hearing Australia has already started implementing the solution in its centres across Australia and this is proving popular among its clients.

“Our clients have indicated they’ve noticed a marked difference with NAL’s hearing aid adjustments. They have improved their understanding of masked speakers while having no impact on the sound of their own voice or other sounds,” says Emma Church, Hearing Australia Audiologist.

“Restoring the ability to understand speech takes the stress out of everyday tasks like shopping and attending health appointments; so we’re keen to spread the word about our solution,” says Dr Edwards.

NAL’s recommendations have been released to audiologists worldwide and detail how they can implement the adjustments to their patients’ hearing aids to allow them to better understand people wearing masks.

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About the National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL) NAL is the research division of Hearing Australia. Since 1947, research conducted by NAL into hearing has opened new ways to help people with hearing loss. NAL’s mission is to lead the world in hearing research and evidence-based innovation to improve hearing health and transform the lives of people with hearing difficulties.

About Hearing Australia For over 70 years, Hearing Australia has been helping Australians rediscover the joy of sound. Its purpose is to provide world leading research and hearing services for the wellbeing of all Australians. Hearing Australia operates in 168 permanent hearing centres as well as visiting sites across Australia and is the nation’s largest provider of government-funded hearing services for children, young adults up to 26, eligible adults with complex communication needs, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, pensioners and veterans.

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