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Coronavirus – Advisory for People with Disabilities

Visually Impaired people survive by touch; hand-over-hand signing to communicate; fingers scanning, Braille public signs for mobility; hugs and hand-shakes to feel connected.

COVID-19 disease is caused by **SARS** (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)-**CoV-2 Virus**. While not everyone experiences complete darkness and total silence; touch is critical and now comes with a significant risk of the COVID-19. For People with Disabilities (PwDs), all the global challenges that come with the COVID-19 pandemic certainly apply, but there are additional barriers.

Coronavirus –Poses Unique Medico-psychological Challenges for PwDs:

- (i) **Sanitization barrier:** Frequent hand-washing is not always feasible for people with certain types of physical disabilities.
- (ii) **Communication barrier:** Getting information can be more difficult for people with vision impairment, hearing impairment, and even cognitive disabilities, as popular news sources may not be accessible.
- (iii) **Social distancing barrier:** Maintaining minimum distance is another severe problem for certain people with disabilities.
- (iv) **Psychological barrier:** Many **Visually Impaired** people don't intend to seek help from others thinking that other person may be suffering from COVID-19. PwDs with a chronic illness is going through anxiety, stress, boredom, frustration, irrational thinking, negative thinking and mental trauma, thinking that they won't be able to access groceries or medicine if the supply runs short.
- (v) **Movement barriers:** Sidewalks may be dangerous while moving in traffic restricted places and may be unable to take public transportation. There may be fewer outdoors trips during COVID-19 pandemic period.
- (vi) **Use of personal protective equipment barrier:** Masks, can make communication more difficult for patients with hearing loss. Persons with

visual disabilities rely on “**touch functions for mobility and work**”, thus, increasing their risk of infection.

- (vii) **Medical Infrastructure barrier**: There's fear that medical resource allocation, including ventilators, may be discriminatory against PwDs.

Precautions for PwDs in the backdrop of COVID-19:

- (i) They should wash their hands with sanitizers/soaps more frequently as compared to healthy people.
- (ii) In case of emergency, they must consult a doctor through **Telemedicine**.
- (iii) They must install **Aarogya Setu, a mobile app** in their Mobile phones to help the PwDs in many ways such as :
 - (a) To identify their risk of contracting COVID-19.
 - (b) This app will alert if someone who tests positive for Novel Coronavirus comes near to them unknowingly
 - (c) The app alerts are accompanied by **instructions on how to self-isolate** and what to do in case one develops symptoms of COVID-19.
 - (d) It has a tool for self-testing.

Sd/-

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