

# Definitions

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**Adventitious deafness** – Deafness in individuals who were born with normal hearing, but at some point lost their hearing through illness or accident.

**American Sign Language (ASL)** – ASL is the natural, visual language of deaf people. ASL has its own syntax and grammatical structure and is one of the most commonly used foreign languages in the U.S.

**Audiogram (threshold audiogram)** – A graph which plots the type and degree of a person's hearing loss. It reflects the frequency (pitch) and intensity (loudness), marked in decibel units.

**Audiologist** – A professional with a master's degree in audiology who measures and evaluates hearing and prescribes hearing aids as appropriate.

**Cochlear implant** – An electronic prosthetic device that is surgically placed in the inner ear and under the skin behind the ear for the purpose of providing useful sound perception via electrical stimulation of the auditory nerve.

**Congenital deafness** – Deafness in a person which occurred before or at birth.

**Cued speech** – Speechreading that uses eight hand shapes and positions to augment the visible lip movements of speech

**Deaf** – A person with hearing loss of such severity that communication and learning is primarily by visual methods (i.e., manual communication, writing, speechreading, and gestures).

**Deafblind** – A dual sensory loss that interferes with the ability of a person to function effectively in the "hearing-sighted" world. This term does not necessarily mean total lack of hearing and vision.

**Fingerspelling** – Using the manual alphabet to spell words. The manual alphabet is 26 single hand positions representing the 26 letters of the alphabet.

**Gallaudet University** – Located in Washington, D.C., this is the only liberal arts university in the world designed exclusively for deaf and hard of hearing students. In addition to its undergraduate and graduate academic programs, the University also offers national demonstration elementary and secondary education programs.

**Hard of hearing** – A person with some degree of hearing loss ranging from mild to profound and who may benefit from the use of hearing aids or other assistive listening devices. They depend primarily upon spoken English in communicating with others.

**Hearing aid** – A device that amplifies sound. It does not discriminate between wanted sounds (the message) and unwanted sound (background noise or competing messages).

**Interpreter** – A sign language interpreter facilitates communication between deaf and hearing people by signing what is said and speaking what is signed. An oral interpreter provides a similar service but uses oral communication (speech reading) instead of sign language.

**Late deafened** – A person with severe to profound hearing loss, which occurred after the development of speech and language. They can benefit from the use of visual display technology, but usually very little from hearing aids or other listening technology.

**Meniere's Disease** – A disease characterized by sudden attacks of dizziness, ringing in the ear, vomiting and possible hearing loss in one or both ears.



Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

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## Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division

651-431-2351 (V) • 888-206-6501 (TTY) • 651-431-7417 FAX • [www.dhhsd.org](http://www.dhhsd.org)

**Relay service** – A live telephone link that connects deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired people who use special telephone equipment to hearing people who use standard telephones through a third party operator. To use the Minnesota Relay, call 1-800-657-3529, or 711.

**Oralism, oral training** – A method of training or educating people with a hearing loss to communicate through speech and speech reading, without using sign language or fingerspelling.

**Postlingual deafness** – Deafness which occurs after auditory English language patterns have been established, typically after age four.

**Prelingual deafness** – Deafness which occurs before auditory English language patterns are established. This loss usually occurs at birth or shortly afterwards up to age three.

**Presbycusis** – Hearing loss due to the aging process.

**Speechreading** – Attempting to understand the oral language or speech of a person by observing lip movements and facial expressions. This skill widely known as lipreading is correctly referred to as speechreading. Only about 30 percent of spoken English can be understood through speechreading.

**Tinnitus** – Noise perceived by the brain when no external sound is present. People with loud or persistent tinnitus hear noises varying from a low roar to a high pitch. The severity of the symptoms can also vary from day to day. Most people from time to time notice a slight ringing sound in their ears; this is normal.

**TTY/TDD/TT (text telephone)** – This device transmits and receives typewritten messages over phone lines. It is a means of electronic communication between deaf people or deaf and hearing people.