

COLORADO COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

E-Journal

News about Colorado's Deaf & Hard of Hearing Communities

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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY BASICS SERIES

by Rebecca Herr for CCDHH

Telecommunications Relay Services: An Introduction to Communication Options

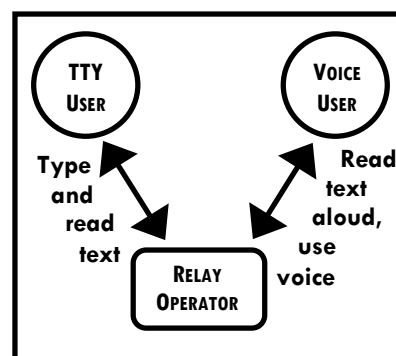
Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) allow people with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate over telephone lines by using a specially trained third-party operator to translate speech into text or sign language into English. By using relay services, people who have trouble hearing and speaking on the telephone can make their own calls independently, without relying on friends or family members to make phone calls on their behalf. Relay services are covered under Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires telephone companies to establish statewide and interstate relay services to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Federal Communications Commission regulates relay services (see the TRS web page at www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/trs.html).

The relay operator, sometimes called a “Communication Assistant” or “CA”, provides voice-to-text or text-to-voice translations between individuals who can hear and use their voices and those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind, or speech-disabled. The operator uses a computer monitor and keyboard while wearing a telephone headset. The operator serves as the “link” in the conversation, converting all the TTY messages from the caller into voice messages, and all voice messages from the called party into typed messages for the TTY user. The operator also conveys information about emotions or “tone of voice” from the voice caller, inserting phrases such as “[sounds friendly]” or “[laughing]” for the TTY user to read.

The Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH) person can use a TTY, or teletypewriter (also called a “text telephone” or a TDD, for “Telecommunications Device for the Deaf”), which looks like a small manual typewriter, with a keyboard and a small display screen or paper printout. In some types of relay (CapTel and VCO), the D/HH person responds verbally after reading the written text. Or the Deaf or Hard of Hearing person can use a desktop or laptop computer with an Internet connection (for Internet Relay) or a wireless two-way pager (Wireless Relay) instead of a TTY. The hearing person receiving or making a relay call uses a standard telephone—no special equipment is needed to call a person who uses a TTY.

Text to Voice and Voice to Text

In a basic relay call, a Deaf/Hard of Hearing person will type text on a TTY (or computer or wireless pager). The relay operator receives the typed text and reads it aloud to the hearing person. When the hearing person responds, the relay operator types those words and transmits them to the D/HH person to read on the TTY display screen. Telecommunications Relay Service is used when one person is using a TTY (or a computer with Internet access or a wireless pager) and the other person is using a conventional telephone. If both parties on a call are using TTYs, they simply type the conversation back and forth directly, without using a relay operator.



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All relay services are free to the user. The services are supported by the Disabled Telephone Users Fund, through a six-cent monthly surcharge on the bills of all residential and business telephone users. All relay calls are strictly confidential, and no records of the conversation are kept. The relay operator does not interject opinions or offer advice. There is no time limit on calls, and there are no restrictions on the type or number of calls. Relay services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. You can make relay calls to people in other states, and even international relay calls. The caller is responsible for any long-distance charges.

In public places, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that there be one TTY public pay phone for every four regular pay phones available to the public in places such as hotels, convention centers, theaters, and airports. All local relay calls on TTY public pay phones are free of charge. Non-local and toll calls can be placed collect or billed to a third party, calling card, or prepaid phone card.

How to Place a Relay Call

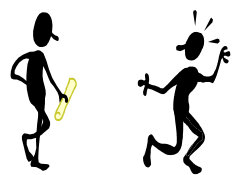


In Colorado, you place a relay call in one of two ways: either dial 711, or call the toll-free number for the specific relay service you want to use (see the descriptions below). The relay operator will identify himself or herself with a personal identification code, a series of numbers followed by an “M” or “F” to indicate whether the relay operator is male or female. If you are placing a call to a Deaf or Hard of Hearing person, give the relay operator the phone number of the person you wish to call. You may also give the operator dialing instructions for the call, such as “Please explain how relay works to the person who answers” or “I need to speak to the regional customer service manager for Denver.” If you are using a TTY to call a hearing person, dial 711 or the appropriate toll-free relay number.

Remember that in a basic relay call, only one person speaks at a time. When you are finished speaking or typing, you say (or type) “GA” for “Go Ahead” to signal that it is the other person’s turn to speak. When you are ready to end a call and have no further comments, you say or type “GA to SK.” (“SK” means “stop keying.”) If you receive a “GA to SK” message and have nothing more to say, you type “SKSK”, which means, “I will stop keying now too, ending this call.”



How to Receive a Relay Call



When you answer a relay call, the relay operator will say, “Hello. A person is calling you through Colorado Relay. Have you received a relay call before?” If you say yes, the call continues through the operator. If you say no, the relay operator will explain how the relay calls work, and then proceed with the call. A relay call may take longer than a conventional phone call, due to the waiting time while the other person or the relay operator types the text.

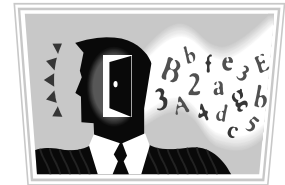
Some people hang up when they hear the relay operator announce the call, thinking that the call is from a telemarketer. **Please do not hang up!** Accept the call and help provide full communication access for your Deaf and Hard of Hearing contacts. Relay Colorado has put together an educational packet of information for businesses on how to use relay services, to encourage business to communicate with Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers using relay: “We can give you 300,000 potential customers...”



When you converse using relay, speak directly to the other person, not to the operator. Instead of saying, “Tell her I will meet her at 4:30,” say, “I will meet you at 4:30.” And please remember to say “GA” or “Go Ahead” when you are finished with your message and want the other person to respond.

Relay Colorado: A Guide to Services

In Colorado, Telecommunications Relay Services are provided by Sprint Communications, which won the Relay Colorado contract in a competitive bidding process. Other states may have contracts with other relay providers, such as ATT Relay or Hamilton Relay. Telephone Relay Services began in Colorado in 1989, and have been administered by the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) since 1992. The PUC State Relay Administrator is Joe Benedetto, who also represents the Deaf Community on the Colorado Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. He may be reached at 303-894-2512 (Voice/TTY), or by email at Joe.Benedetto@dora.state.co.us.



Colorado is fortunate to have a variety of relay services available to meet our expanding communication options. At the Commission offices, Sprint and Relay Colorado provide us with business cards for

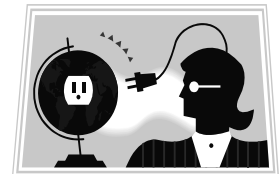


relay users to use to explain Telecommunications Relay Services. Relay users write their TTY or CapTel numbers on the cards and the cards tell callers who are not familiar with relay services how to use the system to call Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. We encourage relay users to use these cards; please drop by the Commission offices on Tuesdays to pick them up, or contact us by email at Deaf.Commission@state.co.us and we can mail them to you.

Voice Caller to TTY User

Dial 711 or 1-800-659-3656

To call a TTY user, a voice caller calls either 711 or the toll-free number. (Some office phone systems are not programmed to allow 711 calls.) This first step in the relay process, contacting the TRS call center, is the functional equivalent of getting a “dial tone”—now you are ready to start the relay call. You say, “I would like to place a relay call to 303-866-4824. Go Ahead.”



TTY User to Voice Caller

Dial 711 or 1-800-659-2656

To make a relay call from a TTY, the TTY user types in the 711 or toll-free relay number to reach the call center. They then give the number they want to call and any calling instructions, such as, “Please ask for Mary Jones in Customer Service.” The call then proceeds the same as a Voice-to-TTY call.

International Relay Calls

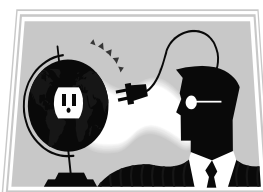
Dial 711; incoming calls use 1-605-224-1837

Residents of Colorado can place and receive relay calls to and from anywhere in the world in English or Spanish. Callers from countries outside the US can call Relay Colorado at 1-605-224-1837 to communicate with Colorado residents via relay.

Voice Carry-Over, or VCO calls

Dial 711 or 1-877-659-8260

Some Deaf and Hard of Hearing people prefer to use their own voices in a conversation, rather than typing their words. Senior citizens, for example, or others who lost their hearing later in life and can speak clearly may find that VCO allows them to carry on a more natural conversation. In a VCO call, the Deaf or Hard of Hearing person uses his or her voice to speak directly to a hearing person instead of typing to the relay operator. The relay operator types the response from the hearing person, so the D/HH caller can read the text on their VCO phone or TTY. No typing is required on VCO calls, except by the relay operator. There are even portable VCO devices that attach to any standard telephone, so a D/HH person can make relay calls through any telephone away from home—including cell phones.



Spanish Relay, TTY-to-Voice and Voice-to-TTY

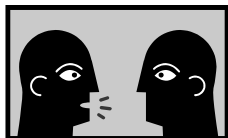
Dial 1-888-659-2656

People who communicate in Spanish can use TRS in several ways. TTY users can type in Spanish, and their words in Spanish will be conveyed by the relay operator to the person they are calling. TTY users can also request that the relay operator translate their Spanish text into English words, or to have English speech trans-

lated into Spanish written messages. English-speaking callers can make relay calls to Deaf or Hard of Hearing Spanish speakers this way. Spanish Relay services are available for calls within Colorado as well as to other states. To make a Spanish Relay call, use the toll-free number above and tell the relay operator how you want the call translated.

Speech-to-Speech Relay (STS)

Dial 1-877-659-4279



People with speech disabilities can use relay services provided by specially trained operators who are skilled at understanding a variety of speech disorders. The person uses his or her own voice or a speech synthesizer and speaks directly to the relay operator, who then repeats what the caller says to the other person so that the caller's words are clear and understandable. STS calls can be made by anyone and to anyone with a speech disorder, and calls can be made to and from persons who use TTYs.

Telebraille

Dial 1-800-659-2656

Telebraille is a customized service for Deaf-Blind users, who use a specialized TTY that prints a Braille version of the relay call. The relay operator can vary the speed at which the words appear on the Deaf-Blind person's TTY device for easier reading, adjusting it upon request from the user.

Hearing Carry-Over

Dial 1-800-659-3656

People with speech disabilities who can hear on the telephone can listen to the other party's voice on the telephone, and then respond through relay by using a TTY. The speech-disabled person types his or her part of the conversation, and the relay operator reads the text to the other caller.

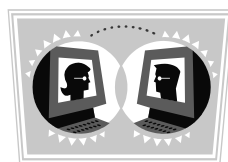
Answering Machine Message Retrieval

Dial 711 or 1-800-659-2656

People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing can use relay services to understand voice messages left on answering machines. Users would call 711 or the appropriate relay service (such as the CapTel operator) and give the relay operator the phone number and the answering machine access code to retrieve the messages. CapTel captioned telephone users (see below) can retrieve voice mail messages using the CapTel phone, so the messages will be captioned.

Colorado Video Relay Service (COVRS)

www.covrs.com or 1-866-410-5787

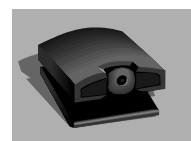


Sprint Video Relay Service (VRS) enables users who use sign language to communicate via videoconferencing with a remote Video Interpreter, who then relays the signed communication over the phone, in real time, to the hearing party. The Deaf or Hard of Hearing user uses a computer, web camera, and high speed Internet connection to access VRS. By using sign language over the full motion video, this allows the sign language user to fully express in their natural language and convey facial expression and cues to ensure nothing gets lost in the translation. With Video Relay, there is no typing, no extended delay, and no "GA"—just faster communication that flows as freely as natural conversation. Long-distance charges do not apply to VRS calls, and the service is available for Macintosh users also. **VRS Operating Hours:** Monday-Thursday: 5:00 a.m. to 11 p.m., Weekends and Holidays: 6: a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sorenson Video Relay Service (VRS)

www.sorensonvrs.com or 1-866-327-8877

Sorenson Video Relay Service (VRS) is a free service for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community that enables anyone to conduct video relay calls with family, friends, or business associates through a certified ASL interpreter via a broadband Internet connection and a video relay solution (or VRS call option). Sorenson VRS uses a television, web camera, and a high-speed broadband connection (DSL, cable, or T1 line) to provide its "VideoPhone" service. Video relay calls are placed through the Sorenson VP-100 videophone appliance connected to a TV, or

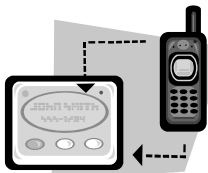
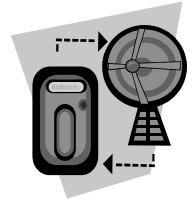


through a personal computer with a Web camera and Sorenson EnVision SL (or Microsoft NetMeeting) software. The sign language user sees an ASL interpreter on their TV and signs to the interpreter, who then contacts the hearing user via a standard phone line and relays the conversation between the two parties. Hearing customers can also place video relay calls to Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals by dialing the toll-free number 1-866-FAST-VRS (1-866-327-8877) with a standard telephone. Sorenson also offers a "SignMail" service, which allows Sorenson VRS interpreters to leave video messages when a hearing caller attempts to call and the person's VP-100 is not answered.

Sprint Relay Wireless

www.GoAmerica.com

The new generation of wireless text pagers now offer relay services! This allows pager users to make text "calls" to voice phone numbers (through relay) or directly to TTY numbers and other pagers, using the device as a mobile, very compact TTY. Sprint Relay Wireless is available for the T-Mobile Sidekick, RIM BlackBerry, RIM 857, RIM 850, and RIM 950 two-way text pagers through www.GoAmerica.com. The Sprint Relay Wireless software is downloaded for free to the pager. The user opens the program, dials a number or selects one from the address book, gives the relay operator instructions for making the call, and then the relay service connects the call. No need to dial 711. Users can change the display font for easier reading, or copy and paste the text conversation to an email file or a notepad. For an additional charge of \$9.95 (and an activation fee), users can subscribe to the unlimited use of the WyndPower collection of enhanced services: live incoming TTY calls, pager-to-pager live chat, TTY messaging, and Voice-to-Text Voice Messaging (in which hearing callers call a toll-free number and leave a voice message, which is transcribed and sent to the pager as a text message). Users who are AAA Auto Club members can summon AAA Emergency Roadside Service directly from their wireless devices. Users can also have information about captioned films showing in area theaters delivered directly to their wireless devices by InSight Cinema, a nationwide provider of open-captioned films.



Internet Relay Service

www.SprintRelayOnline.com

Deaf and Hard of Hearing people can now make relay calls over the Internet, without using a TTY, using a home computer, a web browser such as Microsoft Internet Explorer or Netscape, and a phone line. No high-speed Internet service is required, and domestic long-distance charges do not apply to Internet Relay calls. The service is available 24 hours a day. The Internet Relay user goes to the Sprint Relay Online website page (www.SprintRelayOnline.com), enters the phone number and gives the relay operator calling instructions, and the call then proceeds like a TTY relay call. Additional user features include font size options, and text and background color choices. One useful feature is that Online Relay users can save the text of a conversation as a text file, copy information into other documents, or print out the text. And the online help is available in American Sign Language, with captions! Online Relay is used for outgoing calls only.



CapTel Captioned Telephone Service

see www.CaptionedTelephone.com

One of the newest relay services is for CapTel, the captioned telephone made by Ultratec; Sprint and Relay Colorado provide the captioning relay service. The CapTel phone has an amplified handset with adjustable volume controls, and a small, lighted display screen that displays text captions of the other party's speech. To make a call, the CapTel user simply dials the desired number, and the telephone connects automatically with the captioning service. The other person's voice is sent to a relay operator, who re-voices the words into a computer equipped with voice-recognition software. The words are transformed into text captions, and set to the CapTel user's phone, where they appear on the display screen just after the words were spoken. The CapTel user can thus hear **and** see the words from the other party. Con-



versation proceeds without the pauses and turn-taking that are typical of a TTY call. To use the CapTel phone, a person must be able to speak on the telephone. All outgoing calls that the user makes can be captioned; captions can be turned off for those who don't need them. To receive captioned incoming calls, the user can tell callers to call a toll-free number first (1-877-243-2823), and give the operator there the CapTel user's phone number, so the captions will appear. This relay service works only with the CapTel telephone, which is not available in stores. To obtain a CapTel phone in Colorado, contact Van K. Scheppach, Sprint CapTel Account Manager, at (303) 801-3813 (voice-mail) or by email at van.scheppach@mail.sprint.com. Low-income Colorado residents can apply to receive the CapTel phone through the CCDHH Colorado Telecommunications Distribution Program (TEDP); see the TEDP website at www.cdhs.state.co.us/DeafCommission/tedp.htm, or send an email to CCDHH.TEDP@state.co.us.