

# **Safety Tips for Older People with Visual Impairments Using Rideshare**

Whether you request a ride from Uber, Lyft or a ridesharing service specific to your community, or a family member hails a ride for you from their smartphone, there are steps you can take to be and feel safer getting into a car with a total stranger, even during a global pandemic.

Remember, the driver wants to stay safe just as much as you do. They are following safety precautions between passengers, such as wearing masks and wiping down surfaces with a disinfectant cleaner. However, you must also follow safety guidelines for passengers from the rideshare company you are using. They may change over time, but will very likely include:

- **Wear a mask at all times**
- **Use hand sanitizer before entering and after exiting the vehicle**
- **Sit in the back seat, preferably on the passenger side, to maximize the distance between you and the driver.**

## **Know who is picking you up!**

The app on your smartphone, or the family member requesting your ride will tell you your driver's name, the color, make and model of the car as well as the license plate number. You can use your low vision aids to identify when your ride arrives, but if you can't recognize the make and model of a car, no worries, someone standing near you

probably can. And, if you can't see the color of the car, you can tell someone nearby to watch for the white Toyota Corolla and then you can ask them to verify the license plate for you. If none of this is possible, because no one is nearby to help, you can ask the driver who pulls up at your location their name. If it matches the name in the app, you should ask "Who are you picking up?" to make sure there's not two different drivers named David with Uber arriving at the doctor's office to pick up two different people. Through the app, you, or your family member, can also contact the driver by phone to tell them they are picking up a person who cannot see them when they arrive. Tell them they will need to find you and describe the clothes you are wearing, where you are standing and if you are using a mobility aid, such as a support cane or a long white cane. Don't worry about a stranger having access to your phone number, the driver's app keeps your number hidden from them, and once your ride is over, the driver's number will no longer work from your phone.

## **Be smart about getting into the car!**

Never give them your name first. Never ask them if they are "David". Always verify what you know from the app, and what they should know from the request you made. Keep in mind, the app they use does not tell them your last name. It's first names only, so they won't say, "I am picking up Mr. Williams". You should sit in the back seat to maintain distance between you and your driver. If you cannot see if the driver is wearing a mask, ask him. When you are settled into your seat, and you have your seat belt fastened, the driver may ask where you are going in order to verify your destination. Another easy step to increase your comfort level is to ask, "Where does the app say I am going?". It may not be an address, it may be "Giant Food Store". Be aware, the GPS will guide the driver, and if it seems like they are going out of the way, the GPS may be routing them around traffic, construction or a road

closure. If you are concerned, just verify they are taking you to the Giant Food Store on Elm Street. You can offer suggestions as to the best route to take, but don't be surprised when the driver trusts his GPS more than you.

## **What should you do while you ride?**

Chatting with your driver while you ride is not necessary, and you will reduce your exhalations and the chance of unintentionally spreading the Coronavirus if you keep conversation to a minimum. Be cautious not to reveal private information if you choose to have a conversation while you ride. For example, don't share that you are leaving on an extended vacation or that you live alone. You can ask your driver to tell you about landmarks you are passing, like the bank at the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, in order to monitor your progress toward your destination. Talking on your cell phone while you ride can also help you feel safer. "Hi, Mary, this is John. How are you today? I'm on my way home from a doctor visit using Uber. I just got picked up and thought I would visit with you while I ride." Or, you can even pretend to call someone at home and say, "I'm in the Lyft car, and I will be home in 12 minutes.", but keep it short, because your phone just might ring while you are pretending to talk. Another safety tool is built into the app your family member used to request your ride. They can follow your progress on the screen, and they know when you are dropped off at your final destination. They can even chat with you through a phone connection while they watch your progress on their app.

# What to do when you arrive!

When the driver stops and puts the car in park, before you get out, verify that you are where you want to be. “Is the front door straight ahead when I get out?” It’s a good idea to point where you think straight ahead is, so there’s no mistake. If the driver says “No”, keep asking questions, or have him move the car, until you are sure you are where you want to be, or you know where the door to your destination is in relation to where you are. Many drivers will offer to walk you to the door. It’s your choice to say “Yes” or “No”, depending on your comfort level. To reduce physical contact, if you need the driver’s assistance, you can ask them to walk ahead of you and talk to you so you can follow the sound of their voice, or you can place your hand on their shoulder or upper arm so that you are touching clothing rather than their hand to reduce the chance of transferring germs. Remember, there’s never a reason to get your wallet out when you arrive at your destination, because you should not tip with cash, and the cost of the trip and a tip that is optional is all handled by the app on your phone or on your family member’s phone. Simply exit the car and either use your O&M skills or the driver’s assistance to enter your destination. If you realize that you have left something behind in the car, you can find Lost & Found in the menu of the app. The rideshare company will reach out to the driver and arrange to get your item returned to you.

Adding Uber or Lyft to your array of transportation options can greatly increase your independence and flexibility to travel within your community, even now with COVID-19. Some public transportation authorities have established partnerships with rideshare companies to offer people with disabilities reduced rate rides. Check with local resources to see what options are available in your area, and always put safety first.