COVID-19 Health Alert
for Physical Therapy Practitioners

Physical therapy practitioners should be aware that there is:

- Widespread person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 in Washington state. People with COVID-19 can spread the illness even when they feel or look well.
- High risk of severe COVID-19 illness in persons older than 60 years.
- High risk of severe COVID-19 illness in persons with underlying health conditions.
- No method to completely remove the risk of person-to-person spread of COVID-19 in an in-person setting.

Governor Inslee’s proclamation 20-25 allows health care providers to continue to provide essential health services. To control the spread of COVID-19, in-person treatment should be limited to patients with a clear and documentable urgent medical need. Practitioners should also consider if services can be appropriately provided via telehealth. Some in-person services are non-essential and should not be provided. No in-person appointment is risk-free, even if the patient and practitioner both appear well. Practitioners should weigh their own risk and comfort level when deciding whether to continue in-person visits.

Actions requested:

- Only provide in-person services to patients with urgent medical needs when the treatment cannot be safely or effectively delivered via telehealth. Examples include, but are not limited to, post-surgical patients requiring physical therapy and treatment of acute injuries to decrease pain, inflammation, and prevent hospitalization.
- Use your clinical judgement to cancel appointments that are not urgent, or consider adjustments such as telehealth services.
- When treatment is medically necessary, screen the patient for symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) or COVID-19 symptoms before they enter your practice. If a patient has respiratory symptoms, do not provide treatment. Instead, refer the patient to their primary care provider.
- Make sure patients practice social distancing of six feet in waiting rooms and other areas of the practice.
- Closely follow CDC guidelines for hand hygiene, and clean equipment and facilities between patients.
- Remind sick employees to stay home. Do not require them to work. Allow all employees who are uncomfortable with continuing to work in the clinic to stay home or work remotely, if possible.
- Consider wearing a face mask or cloth face covering when providing in-person services and when within six feet of another person. Provide face covers and request use by clients when close proximity is necessary.
Background:
The virus causing coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19), emerged in December 2019 and has since spread around the world causing a global pandemic. Eighty percent of cases are mild, but severe disease and deaths are more common in the elderly (older than 60 years) and in those with underlying health conditions. Health experts are concerned that increasing transmission in our state and an increase in severe disease will limit the ability of our healthcare system to provide urgent care to all who require it.

Additional resources for physical therapy practitioners:
Physical Therapy Association of Washington COVID-19 Guidelines
American Physical Therapy Association Coronavirus Resources
Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy COVID-19 Resources
CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19) Web Page
DOH Coronavirus (COVID-19) Web Page

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.