

## Questions and Answers following the Provincial Health Officer's March 23, 2020 Update for Regulated Health Professionals

The College of Physical Therapists of British Columbia has compiled questions and answers about Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry's [March 23, 2020 update for regulated health professionals](#).  
[PHO Letter Re Non-Essential Services Health Profession - March 23 2020.pdf](#)

*What does this update from the Provincial Health Officer mean for registrants of the College?*

- In person community physical therapy services should be suspended unless they are deemed to be urgent services (described below) .
- This advice reinforces the advice sent by the College to registrants on March 17, 2020.
- Dr. Henry clearly outlines expectations and principles important to consider as physical therapists consider their practice context and needs of patients.
- The expectation is that all health care practitioners in the community to whom this notice applies will comply with Dr. Henry's advice and expectations.

*In her update, Dr. Henry said: "All non-essential and elective services involving direct physical contact with patients and clients should be reduced to minimal levels, subject to allowable exceptions, until further notice."*

*What are allowable exceptions?*

- In the context of physical therapy practice the College provides guidance, not a directive about urgency. As there are few, if any allowable exceptions that would fall under emergency services the College has focused on urgent services.
  - Services to address a decline in functional independence or safety of those beginning to fail at home including risk of: falls, deterioration of mobility or transfers, respiratory distress, hospital (re)admission, disabling chronic pain, or the ability to care for dependents.
  - Services specified as urgent by the referral source or are deemed urgent to prevent a poor outcome following a recent fracture, surgery, chest infection.
  - Services for clients with complex care needs who require a co-ordinated team approach.
  - Services to support clients in critical roles remaining at work i.e. health professionals, emergency services in the community, essential services employees.
- Please note that the College is unable to generate a list of all services that could be defined as urgent.

*If I am providing urgent services how should I screen my patients for COVID-19?*

- Ask the patient if they are experiencing any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), as described by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), including cough, sneezing, fever, sore throat, and difficulty breathing.
- Ask about any recent [travel](#) outside of Canada.
- Ask about any contact with individuals who have a confirmed or presumptive diagnosis of COVID-19.
- Try to pre-screen patients by phone if possible.

- As suggested by BCCDC, individuals can use the [COVID-19 BC Support App and Self-Assessment Tool](#) to help determine if they need further assessment or testing for COVID-19

*What if I have symptoms as a provider?*

- Go to <https://bc.thrive.health/> to access the self-assessment tool and follow the directions.

*What is the expected time-line before non-urgent community services are re-established?*

- The Provincial Health Officer has not provided a time-line, it is unknown at this time. Follow updates on the College or Government of BC website or via social media where updates are regularly posted.

*What are the implications of providing in person care?*

- When direct physical contact is required for the urgent care of patients with presumptive or confirmed COVID-19, health professionals must use infection control practices. See the BCCDC's page on COVID-19 [Infection Control](#).
- If you are not able to ensure adequate infection control, do not provide care to the patient. Seek an alternate approach to meet their care needs (e.g. referral to another provider or facility).
- Practice social distancing, engage family members as possible to assist with providing instructions or care.

*What do I do if a patient feels their physical therapy needs are urgent?*

- It is up to the health care practitioner to determine the urgency regardless of the pressure from patients or elsewhere.

*What do I do if I am aware of health care providers continuing to provide care that jeopardizes community safety?*

- The Health Professions Act has a section called Duty to Report ([s. 32.2 HPA](#)). This requires health care practitioners to report if they are aware that the practice of another health care practitioner may cause harm.

*Where can I find more information on providing virtual care?*

- The College website Coronavirus webpage <https://cptbc.org/covid19/> has several resources.
- The Office of Virtual Health and Digital Health Team at Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) has developed a [Virtual Health toolkit](#) for use during the COVID-19 pandemic. The toolkit provides information on virtual care technology solutions, endorsed by the Ministry of Health and PHSA. COVID-19 resources on the BCCDC website <http://www.bccdc.ca> also link to the toolkit.
- The Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia has tele-rehabilitation resources on their website <https://bcphysio.org/covid-19-resources>

*Who can I contact at the College if I have questions?*

- As staff are working remotely it is best to email [practicequestions@cptbc.org](mailto:practicequestions@cptbc.org)
- We recognize the urgency in responding to your inquiries about COVID-19. College staff are receiving a large volume of questions and are working to return your phone call or email as quickly as possible.