

Direction to Registrants – COVID-19

March 31, 2020

Over the past several weeks, Dr. Bonnie Henry and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) provided guidance to healthcare practitioners in light of the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic. The PHO instructed that the guidance from her office be interpreted by the regulatory colleges and communicated to their respective registrants. The College appreciates the efforts from registrants to comply with this guidance.

Between March 17 and March 26, 2020, CPTBC developed and circulated a series of notices to registrants to interpret the guidance from the PHO. The College's notices aimed to further clarify the posted information and were based on the areas of confusion and misinterpretation that were evident from the inquiries we received. In addition, some registrants appear to be consulting earlier advice when more recent/clearer advice was available.

This serves to replace all previous COVID-19 communications to physical therapists and is in effect until further notice.

For those who are employees of publicly funded health authorities or who are private contractors providing patient and client care in designated facilities or institutions regulated by the *Hospital Act*, the *Health Authorities Act*, the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act*, the *Mental Health Act*, or other relevant Acts:

- Please follow the directives of your employer and/or facility/institution.

For those working in clinic-based private practice, in community-based private practice, or as private contractors for private companies:

All in-person services should be suspended immediately except in the rare and exceptional circumstance that would qualify as an allowable exception.

- There are very few allowable exceptions. The allowable exceptions to the suspension of in-person service **should not** be used to justify ongoing in-person services to a broad caseload. Exceptions are allowed in rare and exceptional circumstances, following consideration of the risks to both the physical therapist and the patient and the benefits to the patient, and only when the patient is at risk of serious or imminent harm.
- Exceptions should be determined by the physical therapist based on sound clinical judgement and weighing the benefits of in-person service provision against the risks to the patient and themselves.
- The risks will vary depending on the patient and the patient's circumstances/context and depending on the physical therapist and the physical therapist's circumstances/context.
- Even in the case of a patient who is considered an allowable exception, services should be offered via tele-rehabilitation wherever possible. See [CPTBC tele-rehabilitation resources](#) and the [PABC Virtual Care Toolkit](#) for information.

- In the case of a patient who requires in-person services, these should not be provided if the appropriate infection prevention and control (IPAC) protocols can not be followed. The most current Infection Control guidance for COVID-19 can be found on the [BC CDC website](#)
- In order to provide the appropriate infection prevention and control protocols, the physical therapist must conduct a point-of-care IPAC risk assessment which includes screening the patient for COVID-19, preferably by phone prior to the in-person session to ensure appropriate personal protective equipment is used for the session. Screening for COVID-19 includes:
 - Asking the patient if they are experiencing any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), as described by the BC CDC, 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.

The College is unable to provide a full list of allowable exceptions; only the physical therapist has the information about the patient's and their own situation to complete the thorough risk/benefit analysis required to make that determination. Again, as stated above:

All in-person services should be suspended immediately except in the rare and exceptional circumstance that would qualify as an allowable exception. There are very few allowable exceptions.

The College recognizes that for most private practitioners, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a very difficult and stressful financial situation, both personally and professionally. The federal government has implemented its [COVID-19 Economic Response Plan](#) to support those facing hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. PABC has additional information regarding [this plan](#) on its website.

It is important to remember, even during this stressful time, that registrants are held to the [Code of Ethical Conduct](#) and are expected to take all reasonable steps to prevent harm to clients, to choose to do the least harm possible and to do harm to the fewest people.

The College continues to encourage physical therapists with questions to reach out to practicequestions@cptbc.org if further conversation would be helpful.