

# **Newfoundland and Labrador College of Physiotherapists**

## **Guideline for Re-Opening of Private Physiotherapy Clinics**

### **as per the NL's COVID-19 Alert Levels**

These are unprecedented times for all healthcare providers and the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Physiotherapists (NLCP) would like to thank members and other healthcare providers for their continued work on the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The NLCP recognizes the importance of physiotherapy in the healthcare delivery system and wants to congratulate all physiotherapists, whether you work in a hospital, private practice, long-term care facility or any other setting where direct patient care is provided. As a college, we also want to commend the efforts of those physiotherapists who are offering care to your patients and following all the recommendations by Public Health, Department of Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Please see details of the NL COVID-19 Alert Levels here:

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/alert-system/>

The Newfoundland and Labrador Government announced its COVID-19 Alert Levels on April 30<sup>th</sup>. The NLCP has compiled these guidelines based on the information available from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. These guidelines aim to protect the public, Physiotherapy professionals, and all staff working in private practice Physiotherapy clinics.

The Government's Alert Level 3 reopening plan includes Physiotherapy and private healthcare clinics. These clinics can open should they abide by the public health directives. While clinics can re-open at the designated time the NLCP encourages the continued use of tele-rehabilitation where suitable. Please visit <https://nlcpt.com/> for more detail regarding tele-rehabilitation.

## **Alert Level 4 Guidelines**

At present, in alert level 4, private clinics are to remain closed, except where urgent and emergent care is deemed necessary. Pre-screening must take place prior to any face to face treatments and clinicians must follow guidelines as previously provided on the College website.

## Alert Level 3 Guidelines

Physiotherapists practicing in a private practice setting must follow the protocols established within their workplaces and through Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health.

### ***Clinic Requirements/Physical Space:***

The following protective measures should be put in place for receptionists/reception areas:

- Receptionists should be positioned behind a barrier (e.g. Sneeze guard). If a barrier is not present, the receptionist should wear a procedural mask and be trained in how to don and doff Personal protective equipment(PPE)
- Remove all non-essential items from the waiting areas (including but not limited to magazines, toys, books, and remote controls)
- Clean and disinfect any high touch areas or items that cannot be removed between patients, i.e. pens, chairs, door handles, clipboards etc. (for more information, please refer to <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning-NL.pdf>)
- Display appropriate signage for symptom awareness, hand washing, COVID-19 protocols, etc.
- Hand sanitizer (approved by Health Canada) or hand washing stations must be available
- Modify seating in waiting room so that there is a minimum of two metres of space between patients
- Provide virtual waiting rooms by promoting online or over the phone scheduling, over the phone pre-screening and consent, and promoting contactless or on-line payment. Waiting room strategies could include waiting in cars and patient receives a text or call on when to come in for appointment
- Have clearly defined protocols in place and available to provide to any patient or stakeholder with questions
- Where available have a one-way flow through your clinic space
- Have clearly marked arrows or direction of flow with physical spacing of 2 meters between patrons
- Businesses must try to maintain a one-way entry into the clinic

### ***Scheduling:***

It is recommended that appointment times are spaced to avoid patients waiting in a reception area. This will decrease the number of people in the establishment, decrease overlapping of patients at the reception desk, and will also allow for proper cleaning and disinfection of the treatment areas.

Patients must attend their appointments independently unless the patient is a minor or requires the assistance of another person/caregiver.

Patients will be scheduled on a one to one ratio until such physical distancing recommendations cease. We are asking that you do not treat more than one patient at a time as this increases the risk of cross contamination. These same principles apply to any physiotherapy support personnel.

***Pre-Appointment Screen and Education:***

Prior to any in clinic visit, the client will be screened at the time of booking. All patients will be taken through a pre-screening Covid-19 questionnaire.

Should the patient have any COVID-19 symptoms, advise them to reschedule their appointment. Clinicians have the right to refuse treatment to any patient presenting with symptoms.

Receptionists could go through your intake forms while on the phone, therefore, having less time in the waiting room upon arrival.

***Patients entering the Facility:***

Upon arrival, the patient will be screened again to ensure that nothing has changed from their screen that was conducted at the time of booking. The patient will then either wash their hands for 20 seconds or will use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer approved by Health Canada. Patients are to attend their appointments punctually to minimize traffic in the waiting areas. Where possible, upon entry the patient will be taken directly to their treatment area with their mask on.

***During the consultation:***

Prior to seeing the patient, the Physiotherapist will wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use the approved hand sanitizer. Wearing gloves is an option, but they must be changed between patients and hands must still be washed to avoid any cross contamination. Clinicians should carefully consider the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for all staff and patients. A care risk assessment should be completed to determine the PPE needs for each individual patient encounter.

***Follow these instructions for PPE:***

- Wear a procedural mask when carrying out interventions. The client will wear a mask (procedural or cloth) either provided by the clinic or by the patient.
- If there is a risk of exposure to blood, excretions or secretions, then PPE (gloves, masks, and gowns/lab coat) should be used and donned and doffed properly.
- Hands on care is permitted for the purpose of assessment, diagnosis and treatment. When providing hands on care, efforts should be made to limit the amount of time the clinician is within 2 meters of the patient. All physiotherapy modalities may be used with appropriate PPE usage and infection control procedures..
- Masks can be used for an entire shift unless soiled, damaged, or wet. Masks if removed, must be stored safely.
- Should anyone cough or sneeze during the appointment, re-washing hands or applying hand sanitizer should happen immediately.

***After the appointment:***

To reduce exposure to other patients, clinics are to ensure minimal time in reception areas and promote one way flow through the clinic where possible.

Once the patient is directed out of the treatment area, they again must wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before departure. The Physiotherapist must also wash their own hands and if wearing gloves, change them prior to the next patient. If soiled, the mask must be changed. If other PPE is being used the appropriate rules for removal must be followed.

The treatment area including the plinth/table, chair, instruments, and equipment must be thoroughly cleaned with a cleaner and then apply an approved surface disinfectant before and after each visit. If linens are used, they must be changed and laundered appropriately.

***Gym usage:***

Where the clinic has an exercise area which is being used for physiotherapy treatment, it must be done in a one on one setting such that only one patient is in that area at one time. If this area is being used for functional rehabilitation, all PPE, hand washing, cleaning and disinfecting requirements would be the same. Physical distancing rules remain in place.

***Staff Screening:***

At NO time, will any staff member, health professional or Physiotherapist attend work if feeling unwell. Staff should complete a COVID-19 screening prior to every shift.

***Protective measures for Physiotherapists:***

- Ensure that scheduling is staggered and that there is time in between patients to thoroughly clean the treatment area.
- Treat your patients in individual rooms or areas maintaining 2-meter distance between patients.
- Ensure documentation of cleaning and disinfection techniques and personal hygiene procedures.
- Maintain physical distancing in shared workspaces. Where the 2 meter distance between people is not possible, a mask has to be worn.
- Where possible avoid sharing of phones, desks, offices and other tools and equipment.
- Physiotherapists are advised to change their clothes at the end of their shift and bag the work clothing in a laundry bag to wash at home.

***Increased cleaning schedule for clinics:***

Ensure that your business has a schedule for cleaning and has a designated person who is responsible for the inventory of cleaning supplies. Clinics should increase their frequency of cleaning and disinfecting with Health Canada approved sanitization of all surfaces, including but not limited to desks, door knobs, bathrooms, chairs, pens, modalities, furniture, weights, instruments, tables/plinths, charting spaces, mobile devices and screens.

The information provided here is based on current literature and direction from public health. This guidance is fluid in nature and changes could be made daily. All clinicians and business owners are responsible to exercise their best clinical judgement and do risk assessments daily if not hourly. Physiotherapists must stay informed of the current public health recommendations and orders from the CMOH.

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>

We recognize that things are changing rapidly, and these changes are stressful to all our members. The NLCP is committed to help lead you to the most current information and provide guidance during this time.

*This document is adapted from documents from the Alberta College of Physiotherapists, the NB College of Physiotherapists, the Ordre Professionnel de la Physiothérapie du Québec (OPPQ), Saskatchewan College of Physiotherapists and the PEI College of Physiotherapists.*