

POLICY FOR CLINICAL DELIVERY DURING THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Last Updated: August 2021

Key Changes: Update to isolation requirements for under 18s and fully vaccinated individuals.

Meeting Increased Demand as COVID-19 Restrictions Ease

The health, safety and wellbeing of our clients, therapists and staff, remain a priority. It has always been necessary to consider any risks associated with providing our services to a client. COVID-19 poses an additional risk to consider and needs to be met with a set of measures to ensure therapists and clients understand any risks, how they can be best reduced/mitigated, and whether they agree to proceed with the intended service.

With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, demand is naturally increasing not only from new clients who may have delayed or been unable to access our support, but also existing clients who now require the therapy that they were less able, or unable, to receive during lockdown restrictions.

The impact of the pandemic and the subsequent increase in demand for services is being experienced across all of health and social care, spanning both public and private sectors.

The pandemic has required the rapid development of virtual/remote models and this provided a means of accessing clients during lockdown restrictions. As restrictions ease, this method is also allowing The OT Practice a means to meet the ongoing increased demand. The OT Practice has successfully delivered remote assessments/therapy across a large range of client groups, offering a viable and credible alternative for many, allowing therapy to be provided where it may otherwise be unavailable or subject to a wait.

It is recognised by The OT Practice that remote services will not always be suitable or appropriate for all clients. Should a face-to-face visit be required or preferred we will endeavour to offer this, subject to availability and the below risk management protocols. The OT Practice believe in offering clients choice, and we will present the available option to them to be able to decide for themselves if they feel what we can offer is appropriate for their needs.

Therapy Connect

Our Therapy Connect service, developed during the pandemic has successfully delivered a high number of OT assessments and therapy through remote/virtual technology. This service enables clients to access one of our skilled and experienced occupational therapists, without the wait or additional travel costs which may be associated with a face-to-face visit.

An initial screening call is carried out by the therapist to help ensure it is an appropriate option that where provided it remains a comprehensive service, covering all the required areas. In the event it is not considered suitable the therapist will advise accordingly.

This service can offer clients:

- Faster access to a therapist.
- A more flexible and convenient service.
- No travel costs.
- Increased range of appointment times available.
- Where required, access to specialists who may not ordinarily be available locally.

Conducting Face-to-Face Visits Safely

In the event a face-to-face visit can be provided, the therapist will complete a structured risk assessment tool on every referral they are assigned, to assess any risks associated with a face-to-face visit and consider whether these can be controlled to a level both the therapist and client are in agreement with.

It remains the policy of The OT Practice that **no face-to-face visits of any kind can take place if the client or therapist, is symptomatic or has tested positive for COVID-19.**

In line with updated isolation guidance from 16th August 2021, therapists are still able to undertake visits if they, or the client, have been notified via NHS Test & Trace that they are a close contact of a positive case, providing that:

- The individual in question was at least 14 days beyond their second vaccine dose on the potential exposure date OR,
- The individual in question is under 18.
- The individual in question has subsequently received a negative result on a PCR test.
- If the individual in question is the therapist, lateral flow testing should be completed daily for 10 days thereafter as a precaution.
- If the individual in question is the client, regular lateral flow testing is encouraged, particularly on the day of the visit.
- If all the above have been satisfied, and if both the therapist and client are comfortable and in agreement to proceed with a visit as part of the risk assessment discussion then this can take place.

Risk can never be eliminated entirely, and it is our policy to take an individual approach to risk assessment. This helps ensure that visits only take place if risks have been assessed and both the client and therapist understand these risks, how they will seek to mitigate/reduce these and both the client and therapist are willing to proceed.

Examples of considerations that will feature as part of the risk assessment process, will include but are not limited to:

- The level of local COVID-19 transmission rates and any local or national guidance in place.
- The client's clinical vulnerability to COVID-19.
- The client's ability to understand and follow any mitigation measures required.
- Participation in lateral flow self-testing.
- The environment in which the visit is planned and whether this is conducive to conducting the visit safely.

Once all areas have been considered the findings, possible risks and agreed measures to help control any risks will be discussed with the client. The visit will take place if both the therapist and client are in agreement to proceed.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Face-to-Face Visits

The OT Practice will continue to adopt official guidance for the use of PPE in community settings given this is where the vast majority of our therapist's work is conducted.

PPE for Visits to Client's Homes

It is the policy of The OT Practice that PPE (to include as a minimum a type IIR fluid-resistant surgical mask) is to be used by therapists for all visits that will require entering a closed environment such as a client's home. In accordance with current guidelines, the therapist will also use disposable gloves and apron if needing to be within 2 metres of a client and if close contact is indicated, consider the need for eye protection (face visor/shield or goggles)

PPE for Visits in Other Settings

For visits taking place in other settings (for example, schools, care homes), therapists will follow the policy of the setting in question in relation to the usage of PPE as a minimum and may, at their discretion, choose to use PPE which exceeds the requirements of the setting if they feel their risk assessment indicates this is necessary.

Last Updated: August 2021

For Review: September 2021

Prepared by: Clinical Operations Director

Approved by: Executive Director