

Pandemic Response Plan

This Plan outlines our current actions and changes in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, and the current situation in the ACT.

As health professionals, we always carry a responsibility for sharing and conveying accurate health information, and for building the health literacy of our community. At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, faced with wide uncertainty and the spread of misinformation, we have a particular duty to promote safe and health practices in our work.

Our priorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are:

- Protecting the health of our workers
- Protecting the health of our clients and families
- Protecting the health of our business

At present, there is no evidence of community transmission of COVID-19 in the ACT. There have not been any active cases of COVID-19 in the ACT or in surrounding regions of NSW that have been assessed by the ACT Chief Health Officer as constituting any risk of transmission to members of the community for several months (all cases since July have been returned travellers from overseas or from other states who have already been in quarantine at the time of diagnosis).

As such, in line with the advice of the ACT Chief Health Officer, we consider the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in our practice as extremely low at this time, however a declared Public Health Emergency is still active.

We continue to practice in line with our infection control policy:

- Clinical staff have up to date annual training in hand hygiene, actively practice the 5 moments of hand hygiene, and carry hand sanitiser in cars and bags when traveling to mobile visits
- Frequently touched surfaces (including toys) are cleaned with detergent, with disinfectant wipes, or in the UV steriliser at least daily or when visibly soiled.
- Clients who are actively unwell are not permitted to attend therapy, and the speech pathologist reserves the right to refuse service to a client who is unwell.
- Workers do not attend work when unwell.

In addition to the steps included in our infection control policy, we currently also:

- Receive, read, monitor, and action regular (at least weekly) emails from the ACT Chief Health Officer, NDIA and Speech Pathology Australia regarding the latest restrictions and requirements applicable to health providers in the ACT.
- The vulnerability of our clients means that we are considered a 'high risk setting' by the ACT Chief Health Officer and our workers and clients are subject to more stringent attendance and quarantine requirements than the general public. We receive email updates each time the advice is updated and the list of 'geographical areas of risk' changes, and we remain compliant with these requirements.
- Offer telehealth services in lieu of in-person services where any member of the client's household is unwell or displaying any signs that may be related to COVID-19 (including a runny nose), or to any client who feels uncomfortable or unsafe attending an in-person appointment.
- Remind clients in appointment reminder text messages and emails to cancel or move to telehealth if any member of the household is, in any way, unwell.

- Strictly enforce the refusal of service to any client who displays any signs of being unwell.
- Do not currently use resources or activities that are difficult to clean and could potentially retain viral particles (e.g. sensory tubs).
- Do not allow workers to come to work or allow clients to attend therapy sessions when under a public health directive or when they have visited an area considered at risk of COVID-19 transmission within the last 14 days, or with a positive or not yet returned COVID-19 test result.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic we have already:

- Secured the resources to provide telehealth services (including hardware, software, and clinical resources).
- Obtained the UV steriliser.
- Participated in professional development activities around learning to provide telehealth services.
- Communicated changes in policy and temporary measures to clients.
- Operated as a telehealth-only service for the duration of ACT public schools operating under distance learning procedures.
- Completed professional development around managing infection control risk in health services.
- Secured PPE (surgical grade face masks and gloves) for use in clinical practice if required in the future under ACT regulations.

This policy will be reviewed and updated when any changes are made to the COVID-19 response and restrictions, as advised by the ACT Chief Health Officer, the NDIA, Speech Pathology Australia, the AHPPC, or another governing body with authority over the matter.