

MESSAGE THERAPY ARTICLE REVIEW

**Article Review for Best Massage Practices in a Post Covid-19 Economy**

For review to the New Hampshire Re-opening Economy Task Force

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## MASSAGE THERAPY ARTICLE REVIEW

1) Thompson, D. (April 25, 2020) *Is Massage Critical Care?* Hands Heal EHR Blog

<https://www.handshealehr.com/critical-care.asp>

The author is a practicing massage therapist for 30 years, has provided massage for the USA Olympic team in 1996, a continuing education provider, and the developer of electronic medical record keeping. This article discusses the argument of whether massage is considered an essential business. The author asks the question- “Is massage life saving?, “Will postponing massage worsen a life-threatening or debilitating prognosis?”. The author encourages practitioners to ask the questions that physicians ask themselves when managing a long term illness. The author uses the example of an orthopedic surgeon asking open ended questions about postponing a joint replacement and an oncologist postponing an operation on a tumor. Will the client’s life without massage be impacted in a life threatening way?

2) Allen, L. (April 2020) *Covid-19 and Massage Therapy* Massage and Bodywork Magazine ABMP

<http://www.massageandbodyworkdigital.com/i/1231077-covid-2020/10?>

The author states that there are concerns from some massage therapists stating the following ideas: “My client will be suicidal if they don’t see me”, “The hospital will be full of my clients if they can’t get their massage”, “Obviously you’ve never done medical massage or you would know that it’s absolutely necessary”, and “The virus is trendy”. The author states that although in some states, massage therapists fall under the licensed health care provider network, massage therapists are not saving lives and therefore are not essential. The author also urges practitioners to stop practicing to follow the do no harm principle of massage therapy.

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3) Koplen, M. (April 1, 2020) *Massage Therapy and Coronavirus: 4 Reasons Why Masks and Clean Surfaces Aren't Enough* Massage Magazine <https://www.massagemag.com/massage-therapy-and-coronavirus-4-reasons-why-masks-and-clean-surfaces-arent-enough-122221/>

The author is a Licensed Massage Therapist and Doctor of Chiropractics. The author identifies 4 reasons why massage therapists should be concerned about Covid-19 while practicing. First, the author identifies that Covid-19 is a new virus to humans and medical research is still developing about knowing about mutations and possible immunity. Second the author states that viruses tend to mutate into different strains with different fatality rates. The author mentions that this particular virus has the potential to come back in the fall and states “In health care, it’s best to err on the side of caution rather than take unnecessary and unknown risks. At the least do no harm” Third, there are no treatments to prevent or cure this virus yet. The author refers to social distancing guidelines as the best current practice to prevent the spread of this virus. Fourth, the author states there is much the medical field does not know about the long term impact of the virus on the population. The author states the only proven way to prevent the spread of Covid-19 is through social distancing. The author states the risk of infection outweighs the benefits of emotional support and pain relief associated with massage.

4) Walton, T. (May 2, 2020) *An Open Letter about Re-Opening — to Massage Therapy Employers* Tracy Walton LMT Blog <https://www.tracywalton.com/an-open-letter-about-re-opening-to-massage-therapy-employers/>

The author of this article discusses concerns about reopening massage clinics amidst a “new and highly contagious disease” identified as Covid-19. The author states that employers cannot protect staff and public while reopening early on in a pandemic state. For example, some business proprietors have stated they will offer contact-less payment options, but a person is paying to be touched and in close contact with another individual for an hour or longer. The author gives the example of the use of

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masks and how they limit exposure and spread of airborne aerosols, but not fully protect the person wearing the mask and those in close contact with that person. The author states that direct contact is unsafe with the evidence that social distancing guidelines are still in place by governing bodies. The author asks the question of why government buildings are not opening but other places such as bowling alleys, restaurants and other close contact businesses are able to be open.

The author discusses concerns they have about reopening clinics and in their opinion these concerns are non-protective of Massage Therapists and the Massage Industry:

- Working without a clear understanding of treatment room/building ventilation, and what that means for virus transmission;
  - Offering massage without an understanding of COVID's [clotting risks](#), how [stroke presents early in younger people](#) (newly identified complications of COVID), and whether it's even possible to manage that risk in massage therapy;
  - Assuming that we can effectively screen for COVID by taking temperatures (Remember: In asymptomatic people, absence of fever doesn't indicate absence of infection);
  - Providing sub-optimal PPE and disinfecting products; (disinfection products that are not on the EPA list of recommended products to kill corona viruses and flu)
  - Opening while [testing, tracing, and isolation are inadequate](#);
  - Opening before infections have declined;
  - "Learning as we go" – trying to employ conflicting, confusing messages about infection control protocols;
  - Adding just 15 minutes between clients for infection steps that may require 20-25+ minutes on a good day. (I am hopeful that you plan to pay them for the additional time that this will take.)
- Currently 10-15 Minutes between clients is industry standard and is taught as such in massage therapy certification programs.

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5) Thompson, D (March 11, 2020) *Be safe! Hygiene Practices for Massage Therapists* Hands Heal EHR Blog <https://www.handshealehr.com/hygiene-safety.asp>

The author is a practicing massage therapist for 30 years, has provided massage for the USA Olympic team in 1996, a continuing education provider, and the developer of electronic medical record keeping for massage therapists. This article discusses the review of proper sanitation and hygiene practices for massage and other bodywork practitioners.

- Wash your hands frequently-between clients, before and after eating, after touching your face, after touching surfaces you aren't sure are sterilized. Follow the [World Health Organization's \(WHO\) hand-washing routine](#).
- Show clients how to wash their hands using the WHO routine using alcohol-based hand sanitizer before they get on the table.
- Use hospital-grade bactericide and virucide wipes to clean all oil and lotion bottles, pillows, tools, face cradle and table between each client.
- Wipe down your phone or tablet between clients if used for signature payments.
- Wipe down often used or shared surfaces in your office such as door handles and computer keyboards.
- Change sheets, blankets, pillowcases, and face cradle covers between each client.
- Send clients home if they come in sick
- Don't go to work if you (the practitioner) are sick.
- Don't use lambswool covers or heating pads without covering them with a vinyl table cover.
- Don't stack sheets or face cradle covers on top of each other to peel off with each client.

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- Don't use pillows without a vinyl cover.
- Don't cover blankets with a sheet and just change the sheet. (I.e do not reuse top blankets under any circumstances)

6) Werner, R. (April 2020) *What Will it Look Like When We Go Back to Work?* Massage and Bodywork Magazine ABMP Publications <https://www.handshealehr.com/hygiene-safety.asp>

The author who is a retired licensed massage therapist, author of *A Massage Therapist's Guide to Massage Therapy*, and certified NCTMB continuing education provider talks about when it would be safe in her opinion to go back to work as a body worker. The author states that in order to be safe as massage therapists there needs to be what is called herd immunity, 70% of the population would have to come in contact with Covid-19 in order to achieve herd immunity, however because of how deadly this virus is, the safest way to achieve herd immunity would be through vaccinations which could take several months to develop. Extensive testing including antibody tests would need to be made available for massage therapists to ensure they are infection free and not spreading the virus to clients. Clients will also need to be tested and be able to affirm they are not infected or have been infected and are fully recovered.

The author states that the “10 minute turnover” is over as massage therapists will need to disinfect all surfaces that could have been touched by the client as well as the therapist. The author advises that the therapist should be prepared to change their shirt between every client. The author also talks about air quality inside the office and assessing whether the office has a sunny window or if the office has no windows with an air circulation unit. There could be requirements to obtain air filters if they can filter the small aerosol of the virus effectively. The author states that there is much that we do not know about Covid and we as massage therapists could effectively use this time to reassess and

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ensure there are proper protocols and guidelines for business that is in line with up and coming research.

7) Menehan, K. (April 27, 2020) *Some Georgia Massage Therapists are Reopening Their Practices Some Are Not* The Massage Magazine <https://www.massagemag.com/some-georgia-massage-therapists-are-reopening-their-practices-some-are-not-122614/>

The author is reporting about Georgia's massage therapists and how they are reopening or not reopening their business. The author reports on a massage therapist who has reopened and is scheduling only regular clients they have a relationship with and has instituted an "open door policy" which means that is her office door is open, the therapist is ready for the client to enter the building. If the door is closed, the client will need to remain outside. The same massage therapist stated that her clients were indifferent about the therapist using a mask during treatment and used hand sanitizer upon entering the treatment room. Another massage therapist was interviewed for this article and stated that she was wearing gloves and a mask and "a few clients" wore masks when supine on the table. This massage therapist who chose to reopen has also spread their clients out throughout the day to allow for proper sanitation.

The author also interviewed other massage therapists who chose not to reopen at the end of April. One massage therapist stated that they would not reopen their office because the infection rate in their county was too high for their comfort.

"The measures required to mitigate the exposure and spread of COVID-19 are stipulated in the governor's [executive order](#), with a section specifically addressing massage therapists, hair designers, tanning facilities and estheticians, and which include:

- Providing services by appointment only. No walk-ins allowed;

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- Customers must sanitize their hands when they enter the facility and before any treatment, and the business has to provide a hand-sanitizing product upon the customer's arrival;
- Posting signs stating that anyone with COVID-19 symptoms has to reschedule;
- Requiring customers to wait in their car rather than in a waiting room before their session;
- Staggering work schedules so that no more than half the usual number of employees is on site at the same time;
- Sanitizing all equipment, chairs and tables used by employees and patrons between each client visit;
- Utilizing disposable materials and supplies as much as practicable according to state rules and regulations;
- Requiring all employees to wear Personal Protective Equipment "as available and appropriate to the function and location of the worker within the business location"; and
- Training all employees on additional measures both verbally and in writing. "

8) Texas Department of License and Regulation <https://www.tdlr.texas.gov/covid19.htm>

May 1, 2020

Attorney General Issues Guidance Re: Barbershop, Cosmetology Salon, Nail Salon, Esthetician Salon, Massage Establishment and Laser Hair Establishments Closures

Yesterday, the Texas Attorney General's Office [released a guidance letter](#) to address questions relating to Governor Abbott's Executive Order GA-18. Barbershops, cosmetology salons (including nail and esthetician), massage establishments, and laser hair establishments must remain closed until further notice. The Governor's order overrides conflicting local and county orders.

Link to the Guidance letter written from Ryan Vassar Deputy Attorney General for Legal Counsel <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/news/releases/guidance-letter-about-reopening-non-essential-businesses-regarding-ga-18>



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9) WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT: Nebraska partially reopens Monday May 4<sup>th</sup>

<https://www.wowt.com/content/news/What-you-can-expect-Nebraska-partially-reopens-Monday-570166671.html>

**LINCOLN, Neb. (WOWT)** -- Portions of Nebraska will ease some restrictions on social gatherings and business operations starting Monday, May 4th.

Salons, Massage and Tattoo Parlors can open while maintaining the 10-person rule with employees and customers wearing masks.

10) Maine Reopening Guidelines <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/restartingmaine>

Stage 3, July-August

Stage 3 maintains the prohibition on gatherings of more than 50 people and the 14-day quarantine on people entering Maine. All businesses that have been open may remain open. At-risk people should stay home when possible. Employees in legal and professional fields may return to offices, including State employees, as needed.

***Openings permitted per checklist standards***

### **Personal services**

- Spas
- Tattoo and Piercing Parlors
- Massage Facilities
- Cosmetologists and Estheticians
- Electrolysis Services
- Laser Hair Removal Services, and Similar Personal Care and Treatment Facilities and Services

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12) Swanson, C. (April 30, 2020) *Here's which Colorado businesses can open Friday and where Next phase of "safer at home" begins for counties not still under stay-at-home orders* The Denver Post <https://www.denverpost.com/2020/04/30/covid-coronavirus-which-colorado-businesses-open/>

The author is reporting about Colorado's reopening of business. "retail businesses in Douglas County and most of Colorado outside the Denver metro area now may open their doors to a limited number of customers as long as they implement "best practices.""

"Personal services including hair and nail salons, dog grooming, massage therapy and personal training can also open under the same guidelines. While those best practices often remain vague, experts typically recommend allowing fewer customers in stores at a time and requiring at least 6 feet of space between individuals. Customers and workers are also highly encouraged to wear masks.

Restaurants, bars, fitness centers and movie theaters are among businesses that are not allowed to reopen."

13) Sweeny, L. (April 24, 2020) *Moving Forward During Uncertainty- April 24 Update from ABMP* News letter from ABMP to members <https://www.abmp.com/back-to-practice>

The author is the President of Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals, Associated Skin Care Professionals, Associated Hair Professionals, and Associated Nail Professionals. The author states that there will not be a zero risk situation for transmission of Covid-19. "Even with stringent sanitation protocols and enhanced client screening, there still exists a risk that you will get sick, or your client, or a family member, or more people down the line in your community at large."

"We urge you to make government permission to work only one element of your decision about whether and when to reopen. If your state is allowing you to reopen, you must then examine all the variables and ask yourself these questions on a personal level: How has your community and state been

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affected? What is the level of testing in your community? Who is at home, and how vulnerable are they should they become infected? What is the physical and psychological cost of reopening your practice?”

“That news does not feel good for us to give. We would love nothing more than to be able to share guidelines on what it means to go back to work in perfect safety and health, and hopefully someday not too far down the road we will be able to do that, but this reflects our new uncertain reality. Choose your restart date carefully, adopt new practice protocols, recognize that we may face the possibility of another pause, and understand that future practice will be different from past work.”

14) Washington State Release on the Reopening of Massage Therapy Clinics April 21, 2020 (Directly copied)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020COVID19/HealthcareProviders>

“Governor Inslee’s proclamation 20-25 allows health care providers to continue essential health services. Many services massage therapists provide are considered non-essential and most are considered nonurgent. No in-person appointment is risk-free, even if the patient and massage therapist appear well. To help control the spread of COVID-19, treatment should be limited to patients with a clear and documented urgent medical need.

While the proclamation allows massage therapists to continue providing essential health services, they are not required to do so. Massage therapists should weigh their own and their patients’ health risk when deciding whether to provide in-person services.

Actions requested before providing services:

- Provide massage only to patients with urgent medical issues. Examples include, but are not limited to, lymphatic overwhelm issues, severe whiplash, and acute pain control. Simply having a prescription for massage is not sufficient to establish urgent care.

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- Cancel non-urgent massage appointments. When appropriate, consider providing self-care ideas to your patients and reinforcing the selfcare instructions you provided prior to current restrictions on non-essential services.
- When treatment is urgently medically necessary, ask the patient if they have symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) or COVID-19 symptoms before they enter your practice. If a patient has a fever or respiratory symptoms, do not provide treatment. Instead, suggest the patient contact their primary care provider.
- Make sure patients practice social distancing of six feet in waiting rooms and other areas of the practice. Consider having patients wait outside rather than in a waiting room so complete cleaning can occur between patients. Remind sick employees to stay home. Do not require them to work. Allow all employees who are uncomfortable with continuing to work in the clinic to stay home.

### Actions requested when providing services:

- Familiarize yourself with standard, contact and droplet precautions.  Ensure that massage therapists have the following personal protective equipment (PPE) and are familiar with its use: facemask (surgical mask with ear loops or mask with ties), eye protection (for example, goggles or disposable face shield that covers front and sides of face), gown, and clean, nonsterile gloves. Alternatively to a gown or other covering, massage therapists can change clothes after each massage.
- CDC's Optimizing the Use of PPE provides guidance on actions to take when PPE is short or you do not have PPE, including contingency and crisis strategies. Using crisis measures is not ideal and could put health care providers at risk for disease.

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- Provide a face mask or cloth face covering for each patient to wear during the entire treatment.

Environmental cleaning and disinfection actions:

- Between all patients, clean with soap and water or other cleaning agent to disinfect surfaces touched by the patient. This includes: the massage table's face cradle, table legs and bolsters, and bathrooms, if used by the patient.
- Use clean linens, including blankets, for each patient. Launder linens in hot water and dry completely.
- Throughout the day, wipe high-touch areas (door knobs, handrails, etc.) with a disinfectant.
- Use EPA-approved disinfectant from List N along with CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfection. Diluted household bleach (at least 1,000 ppm sodium hypochlorite: 5 tablespoons [1/3 cup] bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water) can be used to disinfect on surfaces not damaged by bleach.
- Read the label before use of any disinfectant and follow the label's instructions. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser"

13) Werner, R., Thompson, D., Hayden, M. (April 2020) *A discussion on the potential changes coming due to Covid 19 to the massage/bodywork professions* The Healing Cocoon

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QN\\_IpPWkX9k&t=13s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QN_IpPWkX9k&t=13s)

In this YouTube discussion between three licensed massage professionals Ruth Werner (a retired licensed massage therapist, author of *A Massage Therapist's Guide to Massage Therapy*, and certified NCTMB continuing education provider), Diana Thompson (a practicing massage therapist for 30 years, has provided massage for the USA Olympic team in 1996, a continuing education provider, and the

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developer of electronic medical record keeping for massage therapists), and Melanie Hayden (a licensed massage therapist of 25 years in Alberta Canada and proprietor of *The Healing Cocoon*) talk about reopening massage clinics. The pathology of Covid-19 was discussed placing emphasis that information has been changing daily about our knowledge of this virus. Covid-19 is much more contagious than the flu with infected people infecting 3-6 more people, with people presenting as asymptomatic. It was mentioned that diagnosis and mortality rates are not accurate due to limited testing ability in the US and that there are people who are younger with no underlying medical conditions who present as sick and dying of Covid. These professionals also discussed that there are some cases of people becoming reinfected with the disease and that massage therapists can be “petri dishes of infection”. Diana Thompson discussed a personal story of a massage therapist in her community treating a client who then later tested positive for Covid-19. Both the client and the massage therapist were in the hospital during the broadcast of this interview.

The professionals in this interview also discussed how Covid-19 might affect documentation and the need to update intake forms as well as being more stringent with day of screening. The professionals discussed taking temperatures with a forehead strip and ensuring proper documentation and policies around temperatures. Day of intake questions that were discussed were questions about loss of smell and taste, having a sore throat, having a stuffy nose, and finding out if clients have visits to or live in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. It was stated in this discussion that massage therapists as well as the client receiving treatment should be wearing a mask. Masks and shirts should be changed between appointments, proper protocols for taking off PPE also should be followed.

Proper cleaning and disinfecting guidelines were discussed such as cleaning every single item that comes in contact with the client, including the bathroom and chairs in the waiting room. The professionals advised no more magazines in the waiting room and also taking all unnecessary decorative items out of the treatment room. The professionals discussed using vinyl covers for massage

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tables and pillows, removing any cloth furniture, and researching potentials for air filters for poorly ventilated rooms. The size of the room was also spoken about concerning droplet based spread, and it was stated that all the elements of intake, massage, checking out, and re-booking could be done in the treatment room.

The professionals stated that massage therapists need to ensure that they are documenting in electronic health records what measures they are taking with each client to utilize PPE and disinfect properly. The professionals also urged local governing bodies to provide guidelines and protocols because independent massage therapy organizations cannot give guidelines for reopening and managing practices post lock down.

Diana Thompson released an additional intake form for practicing massage therapists to address Covid-19.

Due to the infectious nature of COVID-19, this additional intake form must be completed before each massage therapy session. Please know that people with COVID-19 can be asymptomatic and still be contagious. There is no way to completely protect ourselves from this virus. Ask for the checklist of precautions to see how I am disinfecting my office between sessions. And please answer these questions truthfully and do everything asked so we can do our best to protect each other. Thank you!

### **Testing status**

1. Have you been tested for COVID? The antibody?
2. When? What were the results?

### **Symptoms:**

3. Are you experiencing Fever? Temperature reading:  
Cough?  
Sore throat?  
Shortness of breath? Oximeter reading:  
Sudden loss of taste and smell?  
Fatigue?  
Chills?  
Nasal or sinus congestion?  
Sudden onset body aches?  
New rash or other changes to your skin?  
Have you been doing regular cardio exercise?

### **Exposure**

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4. Are you aware of having been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or anyone who has been exposed to someone with COVID-19?
5. Have you done any air travel, domestic or international recently?
6. Have you traveled to any places with a high infection rate, where people have not been isolating (no stay at home order), or been in any groups of people where social distancing was not observed?

### **Precautions**

7. What precautions have you taken to limit your exposure to the virus?
8. Do you spend time around anyone considered high risk, such as elderly with co-morbidities or immunocompromised family members?

### **Requested Actions**

9. Are you willing to wash or sanitize your hands upon entering my office and post-massage?
10. Are you willing to wear a face mask at all times in my office and during the session?

14) Willians, A., Brown, E. (2020) *Preventing Disease Transmission in a Massage Practice* Massage Mastery Online Publications [massagemastery.online](http://massagemastery.online) (copied and pasted in parts)

This is a recent publication available for free for all Massage Therapists in response the Covid-19. This resources discusses standards of practice for preventing communicable diseases in a massage practice. Chapter 8 specifically discusses Coronavirus. The author states that the massage practitioner should assume everyone going into the office is infected and asymptomatic. The authors discuss how the virus can be spread very quickly, symptoms and underlying risk factors that could contribute to developing serious infections which should be noted for opening massage therapy office back up. In this chapter the authors also discuss considerations for reopening clinics.



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### Risk Factors of Clientele:

- People living in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- People with chronic lung disease
- People with moderate to severe asthma
- People with heart conditions
- People undergoing cancer treatment
- Bone marrow or organ transplant recipients
- People with immune deficiencies
- People with poorly controlled HIV or AIDS
- People with prolonged use of corticosteroids
- People with severe obesity
- People with diabetes
- People with chronic kidney disease and undergoing dialysis
- People with liver disease
- People who are smokers
- Older adults (65 years and older)

The authors presented the federal guidelines for reopening business, with the opinion it is up to states massage therapists to decide to reopen based on the following guidelines and assessing personal risk.

**1. SYMPTOMS:** Downward trajectory of influenza-like illnesses (ILI) reported within a 14- day period and downward trajectory of COVID-like syndromic cases reported within a 14-day period.

**2. CASES:** Downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period or downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period (flat or increasing volume of tests)

**3. HOSPITALS:** Treat all patients without crisis care and robust testing programs in place for at-risk healthcare workers, including emerging antibody testing.

### *Considerations for Reopening:*

#### **It Must Be Legal**

I think we can all agree that we should not open our practices or see any clients until our states lift stay-at-home orders. We don't want to be part of the problem and spread the disease or cause additional burden to health care professionals. Our professional liability insurance will not cover our work if we are providing massage illegally, as we would be if we practice when stay-at-home orders are in place.

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### **Your State Board is a Good Source for Information**

Your state board of massage is in a good position to understand the unique health care situation in your state.

### **COVID-19 is Very Contagious**

If you read the story about Yellow Fever in the introduction to Chapter 3, it may already have occurred to you that understanding the mechanisms of how a disease travels in a chain of infection is essential to preventing the spread of a disease.

So far, we don't know enough about how COVID-19 spreads. We know it travels through both large and small respiratory droplets and by direct contact and indirect contact. We also know it is extremely contagious and that many people are asymptomatic carriers.<sup>4</sup> If COVID exists in your community, then you could potentially provide massage to someone infected with the virus who has no idea they are contagious. Similarly, you could be contagious and not know it. The current recommendation is to maintain 6 feet of distance between yourself and other people. Massage requires close contact with other people and we have to factor this understanding into our decision-making processes.

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

Assessing the availability of PPE for health care workers and essential workers to reduce the spread of Coronavirus.

### **Assessing Risk**

First and foremost, COVID is likely to be with us for a while and it may be some time before scientists develop a vaccine.<sup>5</sup> Based on current research, people who have had COVID once seem to be able to become re-infected.<sup>6</sup> There is a lot we don't know and so any recommendations made today might change tomorrow. We must stay flexible and constantly educate ourselves as new information becomes available.

We'll need to make a deep, determined commitment to preventing disease transmission to keep our families, our clients, and ourselves safe. We'll need to practice sanitation and hygiene on a higher level, as if we are working in a hospital. We'll have to readjust our mindset to imagine that everyone who walks into our practice is potentially contagious.

The author writes that it is best practice for massage therapists to increase their knowledge of disease prevention before opening up their practice through continuing education and to assess the above risks.

The author states that mandated use of N95 masks for both the massage therapist and the client receiving the massage is necessary. Changing the mask and clothes between each client. "If we do open

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our practices in communities where COVID is in circulation in the population, we have to assume that everyone who walks through the clinic door is an asymptomatic carrier of the virus. As a result, we must be incredibly proactive about safety measures and diligent in following strict cleaning and sanitation protocols. We need to supercharge our knowledge, PPE, cleaning, policies, client screening, self-monitoring and client communication. “

### HOW TO CHANGE YOUR CLOTHES BETWEEN CLIENTS

- Wear gloves and a mask to remove potentially contaminated clothing. Don't shake it.
- Place the clothing in a leak-proof trash bag. Don't store it in the session room.
- Wash your hands with soap and water (if available) and/or decontaminate your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Put on fresh clothing.
- Wash potentially contaminated laundry at the end of the day (don't leave it sitting around) in hot water with detergent and dry it with heat.

**How Clean Is Your Facility Now?** If you've reviewed Chapter 5 and can verify that your current sanitation protocols align with those I've outlined, you're in a good position related to facility cleanliness. If you're not currently aligned with the protocols I've outlined, give your facility a deep cleaning and get organized for more. Make sure you are using tried and tested disinfectants like the products I've suggested in Chapter 5 or from the EPA list following shortly.

**Supercharge Your Protocols:** While COVID is circulating in your community, I recommend you supercharge the protocols outlined in Chapter 5 by using a hypochlorite-based wipe or spray to wipe down all hard surfaces of common areas and session rooms between every client session. If someone might have touched it or left respiratory droplets on it, disinfect it.

**Reduce Your Sanitation Burden:** There is research that suggests that COVID-19 can be carried on aerosols formed by solid particles dispersed and suspended in the air including dust.<sup>11</sup> This is a great time to get rid of any unnecessary surfaces that might need repeated dusting or wiping. For example, if you have a lovely collection of rocks and shells, a client might be tempted to touch these items. If you have a shelving unit in the corner covered in dusty books you have an unsanitary situation. If you have two chairs in the session room instead of one chair, the client might touch the backs of both. While COVID is circulating in your community store these items to decrease your sanitation burden.

**Your Reception Area:** While COVID is circulating in your community you may choose to have clients wait in their cars until their appointment time and then text them to come in and take them directly back to your session room. This way, they don't potentially contaminate surfaces in your reception area. You might consider removing extra chairs, magazines, children's toys, water pitchers, tea stations,

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and gift items until the pandemic passes. If a client touches it, it must be decontaminated before the next client arrives.

**Table Warmers and Pads:** Massage therapists use all types of table warmers and fabric-based padding on their massage tables to provide clients with optimum comfort. While COVID is active in your community, I would remove these luxuries from your massage table. These cloth items create one more thing you need to toss in the laundry and make it more difficult to sanitize your massage table properly.

**Linens and Towels:** Handle all cloth products with strict attention. If someone might have touched it or left respiratory droplets on it, launder it in hot water and detergent and dry it with heat before you use it with a new client. Handle potentially contaminated laundry with gloves and a facemask. Don't shake it.

**The Floor:** While COVID is circulating in your community, pay attention to your floor. Wipe or mop hard floors with a hypochlorite-based product and vacuum carpets between clients. As mentioned previously, larger respiratory particles fall to the ground. Walking around on contaminated floors could disperse some of these particles back into the air where they might be inhaled.<sup>12</sup>

**Your Massage Table:** You want to sanitize your massage table, bolsters, and face cradle carefully between clients. Usually, I recommend using a product approved by a table manufacture that does not dry out the vinyl covering of the table. If COVID is active in your community, I recommend wiping the table with an alcohol-based wipe (70% or higher), letting it air dry while you complete other tasks, and then wiping it with the product approved by your table manufacture which is likely to have conditioning agents that lubricate and protect the vinyl of your tabletop.

**Ventilation is Important:** If it is warm enough, keep the windows in your session room open to circulate fresh air. So far experts say that this is the best way to dilute virus particles that hang in the air.<sup>13</sup> If opening windows is not possible, consider the purchase of a HEPA air filtration unit and run it during sessions. While there is currently no research that demonstrates that HEPA air filtration reduces the spread of COVID-19, during the SARS outbreak, health experts recommended the use of HEPA air filters to reduce SARS transmission in isolation wards.<sup>14</sup> Air filtration can remove dust and cleaning chemicals from the air improving the air quality in your session room. Between sessions run fans and open windows and doors to circulate fresh air through the space.

From this discussion so far, you have probably realized that you'll need extra time between sessions to complete "supercharged cleaning." You also want to ensure that clients don't overlap or sit waiting in your reception area dispersing respiratory droplets when they breathe and talk. We'll discuss options for this in a moment.

You'll want to review your current massage policies and update your policies on your business website. Here are some things to consider:

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**Cancellation Policies:** Remove your late cancellation policy while COVID is present in your community. If a client wakes up and feels unwell, the last thing you want is for the client to arrive at your clinic sick because they are afraid of being charged for a session.

**Thirty-Minute Sessions:** Offering a 30-minute session doesn't make sense if you must then spend 30-minutes cleaning the session room. Consider removing this menu item from your list of services.

**Walk Ins:** In a moment, we'll discuss enhanced client screening methods. You'll be more cautious about the clients you allow in your facility. While COVID is present in your community, consider revising your policies to "By Appointment Only."

**Payment:** Virus particles can live on banknotes, checks, credit card surfaces, and touch screens. Handle any form of payment as if it is contaminated. Wear gloves or decontaminate your hands after handling money and keep banknotes and checks in a sealed plastic baggie until they are deposited in your account. Wipe down payment touch screens with cleaners formulated for electronics after each client use.

**High-Risk Clients:** While COVID is present in your community consider advising high-risk clients to forgo massage. Clients in poor health or with underlying conditions place an additional burden on you. It is difficult to ensure anyone's health and safety right now, especially people at higher risk for developing serious COVID symptoms.

**Your Reception Area:** Earlier we discussed how easy it is for items in your reception area to be contaminated. Consider asking clients to remain in their cars until you text them to come in and then walking them directly to the session room. This reduces your cleaning load and also ensures that you don't end up with two clients in the reception area at the same time.

**Staggered Sessions:** If you work with other therapists in the same clinic, plan to stagger sessions so that clients are arriving at different times. You want to keep the number of people that are in your facility at the same time, as low as possible.

**Friends or Family of Clients:** Sometimes a child, friend, or family member will accompany a client to a massage session and wait in the reception area reading a book or magazine. While COVID is present in your community consider changing your policy on client guests and not allowing people to wait for a client in your reception area.

**Client Paperwork:** If possible, have clients complete health intake forms and other paperwork online. This way, no one has to handle paper, clipboards, or hang out in the reception area contaminating surfaces that must now be cleaned. If clients cannot complete health information online, remember that any item a client touches is now contaminated and must be handled with care and sanitized before use with another client.

**Talking During Sessions:** Experts believe that COVID droplets are dispersed when people talk and even breathe – one of the reasons why remaining 6 feet apart and wearing facemasks is important for physical distancing.<sup>15</sup> While COVID is present in your community, make an effort to avoid unnecessary talking with clients in the closed space of your session room. You should still

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communicate about pressure, warmth, and comfort, but having a big laugh and a good gossip could put you both at higher risk.

### **Supercharge Client Screening**

If possible, conduct client health intakes and updates the day before the client's session via phone. Call the client at a predetermined time arranged when they booked the session and ask the series of intake questions you use to determine what the client wants and needs from the massage or if there is any reason why they might be contraindicated. Share the policy changes we discussed in the previous session. You'll also want to ask questions related specifically to COVID-19 like...

Have you had any flu-like symptoms including a cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath? Do you have a thermometer? Can you take your temperature and verify that it is normal or no higher than 100 °F? Have you recently been in contact with someone who has flu-like symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19?

If you have any reason to suspect the client is not completely healthy, postpone their session until a later date.

### **Supercharge Self-Monitoring**

If you develop a fever above 100 °F, or experience flu-like symptoms including a cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath, or if you learn that you have recently been in contact with someone who has flu-like symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19, self-isolate until you can be tested for COVID and cleared of infection. Don't put colleagues or clients at risk.