**Statement to Physiotherapists working in the Ministry of Education (MoE), environment of Special Education from Paediatric Special Interest Group Physiotherapy New Zealand (Erin Swan and Karen Adams), with advice provided by Professional Advisors Maarama Davis and Damon Newrick, The Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand**

**27th August 2020**

This document has been made in reference to:

1. MoE “Managing health and safety in schools at Alert Level 2” (hereby called “MoE document”) <http://education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/COVID19-files/managing-health-and-safety-in-schools-at-alert-level-2.docx>
2. Physio board of New Zealand guidance (hereby called “Physio document”) <https://www.physioboard.org.nz/news/guidance-on-seeing-patients-at-alert-level-2-non-dhb-setting>

The overaching requirements at Alert Level 2:

Physiotherapists must:

* be aware that under Alert Level 2, there may still be some community transmission of Covid-19. An extremely high level of vigilance is required. Physiotherapists must use a high level of clinical judgement at all times when assessing and treating patients in order to keep themselves and the public safe
* have knowledge of and understand the most current Health and Safety procedures, and the latest advice from Ministry of Health
* consider their own safety and that of their own bubble as well as the students safety
* screen students for COVID-19 signs or symptoms on arrival. If they are deemed to be a risk, do not allow them into the clinic or see them in the community until they have medical clearance.  Consider using telehealth services
* carry out a risk assessment and have a plan in place for the premises they are working in whether that be in a clinic or the community. Risk assessment during Alert Level 2 should be ongoing and continuous
* maintain a log of all student, carer and staff contacts in case contact tracing is required
* adapt their working practises to allow enough time between appointments to carry out necessary duties including cleaning equipment, surfaces and their own hands before another student is seen

carefully assess the risks and benefits of a face-to-face consultation if students have significant co-morbidities or vulnerabilities. Consider using telehealth services.

**Planning:**

* Page 7 of the MOE document states: **at level 2 “Children at higher-risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (e.g. those with underlying medical conditions, especially if not well-controlled) are encouraged to take additional precautions when leaving home. Parents, caregivers and students will need to work with the school to develop a plan to manage a safe return to school. Distance learning will continue to be available to those who choose to remain at home”**. Therefore, it is recommended school management will require a written plan for those students who are deemed high risk of severe illness.

**PPE:**

* Page 10 of the MoE document states: “**Nurses in schools and other health professionals will need to follow their own industry guidance for using PPE”**. Therefore, Physiotherapists must follow the guidelines under Alert level 2 in a non-DHB setting. <https://www.physioboard.org.nz/resources/covid-19/level-2-guidance>
* For working with vulnerable people you **must** discuss the risks and benefits with the patient and/or carer before deciding and continuing to make a face-to-face consultation appointment. Physiotherapists can still use telehealth if a face-to-face consultation is not appropriate. If it is decided a face-to-face consultation is appropriate, screening and the use of a surgical mask for the physiotherapist is required as stated above.” - see Physio document
* The level of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), will also be varied and pre COVID-19 gloves and aprons are required, so these practices will continue. However, there will be situations where the physiotherapist is close to the vulnerable students face and this is when the physiotherapist would also consider themselves to wear the mask as part of the protection of the student and themselves - as advised by the Physiotherapy Board. Refer to the MOH document for PPE use.

<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/hp7372-level-2-ppe-guidelines-for-unknown-covid-status-130820.pdf>

**Logging:**

* School attendance records of staff and students as well as your own notes will allow contact tracing if required as advised by the Physiotherapy Board. This will meet the log book requirement as stated in the Physio Board document above
* Physiotherapists must use a high level of clinical judgement at all times when assessing and treating patients in order to keep themselves and the public safe carefully assess the risks and benefits of a face-to-face consultation if patients (are 70 years of age or over or) have significant comorbidities or vulnerabilities. Consider using telehealth services - see Physio document.

**Screening**

* Screening or risk assessment of patients and any support persons for risk of COVID-19 prior to face-to-face consultations is mandatory - see Physio document. If your school is doing appropriate screening at the school entrance on arrival this meets the screening requirement.

**Multiple Sites**

* The Physio Board states “We would recommend avoiding working across multiple sites, however where this is not possible, adapt your practice to minimise cross contamination. Examples of this could be a change of uniform, good hand hygiene, car cleaning, staffing roster changes or timetable alterations to minimise the number of sites visited on one day”