



5 October 2021

Hon. Andrew Little
Minister of Health
Parliament Buildings

Via email a.little@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Hon. Andrew Little

Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ) and the Physiotherapy Board are raising concerns with the current situation and the lack of timely direction for Auckland approx. 1,800 non-DHB physiotherapists. We have been advised by the Ministry of Health that the current guidance for allied health professionals at Alert Level 3 will not change and therefore physiotherapists can only see patients who meet their 'Urgent' criteria.

Our position is that physiotherapists are well trained university-educated health professionals, they are knowledgeable in infection prevention, infection control and health and safety. They understand the science and what measures are required to keep themselves, their staff, their patients and others protected.

The Physiotherapy Board and PNZ have shared concerns around the health and safety of the public as well as the physiotherapy profession. There are a number of pressures for physiotherapists, including financial and personal stressors. However, the overwhelming anxiety is for their patients' wellbeing; for those who are not able to access their services, that in their clinical judgement, require it.

There are numerous examples of physiotherapists expressing concern for members of the public being placed in a position of harm because they do not meet the current 'urgent' definition for a face-to-face consultation. Telehealth does provide some access, however, for many patients it has limitations.

We understand from many physiotherapists in Auckland that private orthopaedic surgeons are continuing to provide elective procedures. Under the current Ministry of Health criteria, physiotherapists are stating they are not able to see these patients, which will have a detrimental effect on health outcomes.

Below is a roadmap that we wish to suggest which aligns with the step approach announced yesterday by our Prime Minister.

The key principles of stepping carefully from the current situation to a more open one is supported subject to infection prevention and control measures in place.

	COVID-19 response Level 3 Steps	Physiotherapy proposal
<p>Step 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outdoor gatherings between 2 households can go ahead, with a maximum of 10 people attending • travel anywhere in the Auckland region for exercise, sports or recreation outdoors is allowed, for example, people will be able to visit the beach, sail, go fishing on a boat, hunt and participate in outdoor exercise classes with a limit of 10 people • early learning centres can reopen to all children, with a maximum of 10 children in each bubble. <p>Everyone is encouraged to wear a face covering whenever you leave your home, and whenever physical distancing is not possible.</p>	<p>Physiotherapists can:</p> <p>See all patients that require their services (the urgent criteria is no longer relevant) provided appropriate infection prevention and control is implemented:</p> <p>Patients (and if required support people) must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wear a mask at all times in the clinic • scan in on entry • be screened and booked (i.e. no walk-ins and no COVID-19 symptoms) • be spaced at least 1 metre apart in waiting room (with no more than 5 persons present at the same time). If physical distancing is not possible, then 1 patient in – 1 patient out. <p>All current infection controls must be in place.</p> <p>If the above cannot be met, then the physiotherapist must use telehealth only.</p> <p>Rationale:</p> <p>Patient care is being unnecessarily compromised. A clinical setting can open as physiotherapists are highly trained in infection control, health and safety.</p>
<p>Step 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retail can operate, with customers able to enter premises, wearing face coverings and keeping 2 metres apart • public facilities like pools, libraries and museums can reopen, with face coverings and 2-metre social distancing required • outdoor gatherings of up to 25 people can go ahead. 	<p>As above, maintaining physical distance.</p> <p>Up to 10 patients in the waiting room so long as physical distance can be maintained.</p> <p>Rationale:</p> <p>As restrictions in indoor public settings ease, restrictions in physiotherapy clinical environments should also ease.</p>

<p>Step 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hospitality venues, like cafes, bars, and restaurants, can reopen with a limit of 50 people • event facilities like cinemas, casinos, and theatres can open with a limit of 50 people in a defined space, wearing face coverings and 2-metre physical distancing • close contact businesses, like hairdressers, barbers and beauty salons, can reopen, with workers wearing face coverings • social gatherings, indoors and outdoors, can take place with a limit of 50 people in a defined space. 	<p>As above with the addition of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No limit in waiting room so long as physical distance requirements are met • Therapeutic exercise groups and Pilates open so long as physical distance (2 meters) can be maintained at all times and masks worn at all times. <p>Rationale:</p> <p>Contact time for many of the step 3 services is no different to many physiotherapy contact times.</p>
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Specific physiotherapy settings (e.g., aged residential care and schools) need to be viewed on a case-by-case basis. Each facility will have their own measures and restrictions in place, and these will take precedence over the above.

We seek an immediate change to the current allied health guidance for treatment at Alert Level 3. Thank you for considering this approach. We are happy to discuss this further if that would assist.

Yours sincerely

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Cc Dr Ashley Bloomfield