

## Speech Pathology Tasmania's Covid Safety Plan (updated March 2022)

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This plan outlines the steps SPT is taking to keep team members and clients safe and limit the spread of Covid-19 as we continue providing services during the pandemic.

## 1. Contact Tracing

Speech Pathology Tasmania will follow government guidelines regarding contact tracing. Accordingly, clients and staff are no longer required to check-in. This means we do not need to use the CheckIn TAS app anymore or sign-in with pen and paper.

## 2. Prevention & Infection Control

Measures we are taking to prevent the spread of Covid-19 include:

- Enabling team members to work from home
- Offering telepractice
- Physical distancing
- Increased cleaning
- Hygiene practices
- Ventilation
- Monitoring symptoms

Details of these measures are outlined in the following pages.

SPT will follow government guidelines regarding mask wearing.

### 2a. Working From Home and Telepractice

We continue to offer a mix of in-clinic appointments and appointments by telepractice.

#### Working from home

Team members may work from home sometimes. This will be decided in consultation with the Office Manager. Client needs will be considered.

It is important that team members do not come to the clinic if they:

- are unwell or experiencing any Covid-19 symptoms
- are self-isolating
- are required to be in quarantine

Current government regulations about quarantine can be found online at [www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au](http://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au)

Team members are encouraged to:

- ensure they have read and understood SPT's Covid Safety Plan and any updates
- follow all relevant steps outlined in the plan
- know the symptoms of Covid-19

- stay home if sick
- follow the steps outlined in the 'Monitoring symptoms' and 'Planning Ahead' sections below if they feel unwell

Therapists are also encouraged to read the current version of [Speech Pathology Australia's document 'Guidance for Service Delivery during Covid'](#). (Last updated 18 January 2022)

## Telepractice

We will continue to offer appointments by telepractice as well as face to face appointments. Sessions via telepractice may be used when:

- the therapist is working from home
- the client has symptoms but is well enough to participate in a session
- someone else in the client's household is unwell
- the client is in self-isolation or quarantine
- the client/guardian and therapist agree that telepractice is the preferred method for that client

Telepractice may not always be possible or preferable. When an appointment can not happen in-person or by telepractice we will try to reschedule. If rescheduling is not possible the appointment may be cancelled.

Clients are asked to read our [Informed Consent for Telepractice](#) information before participating in a therapy session via Zoom. This information is available on our website. A link to the information is provided in each Zoom invitation email. If a client does not wish to participate in telepractice they can phone reception to make other arrangements.

## Client health and safety for in-clinic appointments

It is important that clients do not attend face to face appointments if they:

- are unwell or displaying any Covid or flu-like symptoms including:
  - fever
  - cough
  - sore or itchy throat
  - runny nose
  - shortness of breath
  - loss of taste or smell
- are self-isolating
- are required to be in quarantine

Current government regulations about quarantine can be found online at [www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au](http://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au)

We ask clients to let us know by phone if they are unable to attend. We will then offer for the appointment to take place via telepractice where possible.

Clients who do not feel comfortable with face to face sessions can ask for appointments via telepractice.

Measures we are taking to keep clients safe and reduce the risk of Covid infection are outlined in the remainder of this plan, including the section 'Hygiene during therapy sessions'. We encourage clients to discuss with us any concerns they may have about health and safety during sessions.

### Offsite sessions – school and home visits

Therapists sometimes offer therapy via school visits and home visits. Therapists may stop visiting clients at home, school or other offsite locations if necessary. This will be decided in consultation with the Business Manager and Office Manager.

It is important that clients let us know before a home visit if anyone in the household:

- is unwell or experiencing any Covid19 symptoms
- is self-isolating
- is required to be in quarantine

We ask clients to let us know at least 24 hours before the appointment.

Therapists will not visit if anyone in the household is unwell, self-isolating, or displaying any symptoms of Covid19. The therapist may ask the client these same questions when they arrive for the appointment.

Therapists may discuss distancing & hygiene measures with the client before resuming home or school visits. These measures may include:

- avoiding hugging and handshaking
- keeping 1.5m distance between people
- handwashing before and after the session
- disinfecting any resources used in the session

Therapists will have a Covid safety kit with them. The kit will have sanitiser and protective equipment to use if close-up work is needed. Therapists are encouraged to keep the kit in their car to use during and after off-site sessions.

At the end of a home visit therapists are encouraged to:

- wash hands or use sanitiser
- wipe down any resources used
- wipe down any personal belongings taken into the home/school. These may include bags, phones, sunglasses.

- wipe their car door handle, steering wheel and keys
- store any single-use protective equipment used such as gloves or masks in a sealed zip lock bag until it can be disposed of.

Therapists are encouraged to monitor supplies in their Covid Safety Kit and ask the admin team for more supplies when the kit needs replenishing.

More details are listed in the 'handwashing & hygiene' section below.

## 2b. Physical distancing

### Entering the clinic

To avoid getting too close in our building's narrow spaces we encourage clients to enter through the door in the laneway off Melville St and exit out the street-front door onto Elizabeth St.. Clients with prams or wheelchairs, or who have mobility issues that need to avoid stairs may still exit through the laneway door.

When entering the clinic clients are asked to:

- use the hand sanitising station at the entry
- check in using the Check In TAS app or ask for the paper sign-in page if preferred
- keep 1.5m between themselves and others

Delivery people are encouraged to leave items in the cupboard outside the rear door. We will give directions to delivery people when placing orders.

### While in the clinic

- We ask that clients bring only one guardian or support person with them to each appointment. (For example, one parent with a child but no siblings please).
- Everyone entering the clinic is advised to keep 1.5m between themselves and others when possible. We will avoid handshaking and hugging. We encourage parents to demonstrate and practice this with their children before coming to the clinic.
- Therapists might sometimes need to be closer to clients during sessions to perform some therapy tasks. Some up-close procedures may need to be postponed. There are more details about this in the section below called 'Hygiene during therapy sessions'.
- Therapists may change the layout of their therapy room to ensure distancing during sessions where practical.
- Please note capacity limits for each room. Rooms have signs displayed stating how many people can be in that room.
- Non-admin team members are asked not to enter the admin zone behind reception desk. Please ask admin staff for assistance.

## Contactless payments

We prefer that payments be made via contactless means where possible. This means we prefer to take payments by EFTPos or credit card rather than cash.

We will keep sending invoices and receipts by email for telepractice appointments. Clients that do not come in to the clinic can pay by direct deposit online or by credit card over the phone.

We no longer need signatures for private health transactions or NDIS funded sessions.

To maintain distance while payments are made at reception we will follow these steps:

- admin staff will place the EFTPOS machine at the front of the reception desk so clients can reach it while standing back from the reception desk
- admin staff will avoid handling client cards wherever possible.
- clients will be asked to tap/swipe cards themselves, and read to admin staff the numbers needed from private health cards
- all other receipts will be emailed unless a printed copy is specifically requested
- EFTPOS machine will be sanitised with a disinfectant wipe immediately after each use
- signatures will no longer be required for private health transactions

## 2c. Handwashing & Hygiene

### Sanitising stations & cleaning supplies

Everyone who comes into the clinic is encouraged to use the hand sanitiser at the entry before coming inside. Hand sanitiser will be available:

- at the clinic entrances
- at reception
- in the waiting area
- in each therapy room

Team members are provided with disinfectant spray and cloths or wipes to use at their workstation. Therapists will be provided with offsite kits to use in their car and when visiting homes and schools. The kit may contain:

- hand sanitiser
- disinfectant wipes
- gloves
- masks
- zip lock bags to store used items until they can be safely discarded.

The kitchen and bathroom will be kept well stocked with soap and paper towel.

## Hygiene during therapy sessions

We will practice physical distancing and hygiene measures including:

- Staying 1.5m away from others
- Not hugging or handshaking
- Coughing or sneezing into the elbow
- Handwashing or using sanitiser before and after sessions

We encourage parents to demonstrate and practice these measures with their children before returning to the clinic.

If therapists notice a client displaying symptoms during a session they may end the session early.

At the end of each session therapists will sanitise by wiping:

- Surfaces such as desktops
- Door handles
- Objects clients have touched during their appointment

## *Speech Pathology Australia recommendations*

Therapists are encouraged to follow recommendations for specific therapy practices outlined in [SPA's Guidance for Service Delivery during Covid](#). Therapists are encouraged to read current versions of that document as they are updated.

## *Close-proximity work*

Therapists are encouraged to consider whether close proximity work is absolutely necessary during the pandemic. Some up-close-up work may need to be postponed. Gloves and masks will be supplied for use when close-up work is required.

## *Using toys in therapy*

Therapists are encouraged to consider limiting the number of games/toys used during sessions. Toys that cannot be easily cleaned might not be used. These may include soft toys and toys with lots of parts. All toys used during a session will be cleaned thoroughly at the end of the session. The therapist will clean each toy with a disinfectant wipe and allow enough time for it to dry before the next use. If any toys need further cleaning they will be put in the appropriate container in the kitchen. Admin staff will wash and disinfect the contents of the container.

## Communication about cleaning and hygiene measures

To help everyone understand what we're doing to keep us all safe we will display posters with important information. These posters may include:

- a poster in the bathroom displaying handwashing procedures
- posters at the clinic entry and at reception may include:

- Please do not enter if you have experienced these symptoms...
- Please always sanitise your hands before entering

To make sure we always have enough cleaning and hygiene supplies:

- therapists will notify admin staff when hand sanitiser and wipes in their room are running low or when anything in their offsite kit needs replenishing
- cleaning staff will notify admin when cleaning supplies need restocking
- admin staff will regularly check other supplies and re-order when necessary

## 2d. Cleaning

### Increased cleaning

To help stop the spread of the virus we are doing more cleaning of the clinic. This increased cleaning may involve:

- Cleaning of the SPT clinic has increased from twice weekly to daily during the pandemic. Special attention will be paid to high-contact areas such as door handles, light switches and surfaces.
- An itemised cleaning list will outline items in each room that need cleaning.

### Team members' responsibilities

Team members will sanitise their workspace at the end of each day and in between clients. This will be done using disinfectant wipes or washable cloths and disinfectant spray. Items to be wiped include:

- Keyboards
- computer mouse
- phone
- pens
- desktop
- other surfaces.

When an appointment has taken place in the gym therapists will leave adequate time at the end of the session for cleaning the gym. The gym will be cleaned by cleaning staff each evening but therapists are responsible for wiping down surfaces and equipment used during their session.

Team members are encouraged to clean personal property brought into the clinic. This may include sanitising with disinfectant wipes items such as:

- mobile phones
- bags
- keys
- glasses
- lunch containers

## Further measures

- Toys and books have been removed from the waiting area. Reading material in the waiting area is for clients to take with them.
- Digital record keeping is preferred to avoid the handling of paper files

## 2e. Ventilation in the workplace

We will try to increase ventilation in the clinic when possible by:

- Opening windows in therapy rooms when a session is not taking place
- Leaving therapy room doors open when not in session
- Leaving open the clinic entry doorway when safe to do so

This will depend on the weather. Therapists will be encouraged to open doors and windows when not in session.

Reasons that doors and windows may remain closed include:

- Privacy
- Safety
- Temperature control
- Noise

Rooms without windows may have a HEPA filter installed. Fans installed in the ceiling of some therapy rooms now direct the air outside the building.

## 2f. Monitoring symptoms

### Monitoring symptoms in clinic visitors

Signs about the symptoms of Covid-19 may be displayed at the clinic entrance and reception. Posters displayed at reception may include:

- *Have you experienced any of these symptoms in the past 48hrs:*
  - *fever*
  - *cough*
  - *sore or itchy throat*
  - *runny nose*
  - *shortness of breath*
  - *loss of taste or smell*
- *Are you currently required to be in self isolation?*
- *Have you been in contact with anyone who has tested positive for Covid-19 in the past 14 days?*

If the answer to any of those questions is yes, clients may be asked to leave the clinic. Appointments can be rescheduled over the phone or by email.

Clients displaying symptoms while in the clinic may be asked to leave, wait outside, or put on a mask, as appropriate.

## Monitoring symptoms in team members

Steps to monitor symptoms in team members include:

- Team members are reminded to stay home and get tested if sick or experiencing any of these symptoms:
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Sore or itchy throat
  - Runny nose
  - Shortness of breath
  - Loss of taste or smell
- Team members experiencing Covid-19 symptoms will notify SPT's Office Manager. The Office Manager and therapist will follow the steps outlined in the section below *'If a team member feels unwell'*
- Team members will also notify the Office Manager if they have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with Covid-19
- Team members who are required to self-isolate but feel well enough to work from home are encouraged to do so.
- Team members are encouraged to discuss with the Office Manager, leave entitlements if they are sick or required to self-quarantine. They are also encouraged to ask about flexible work arrangements.

## 3. Planning ahead: case and outbreak management

The Business Manager will coordinate our response to a confirmed case or outbreak. This will be done in consultation with the Director and Office Manager. In the event of a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19 in the clinic we will take these steps:

### If a team member feels unwell:

If a team member feels unwell or is displaying Covid-19 symptoms:

- The team member will notify admin & leave the building
- The team member will arrange their own Covid-19 testing if necessary
- Team members who are tested for Covid-19 will self-isolate until they receive the results
- Admin will cancel the therapist's remaining in-clinic appointments for that day and the next day.
- If the therapist feels well enough to work, the therapist and the Office Manager will decide together whether the therapist will work from home
- If the therapist is going to work from home, admin will offer telepractice to the therapist's affected clients

## Returning to work after a Covid19 diagnosis:

SPT will follow Public Health guidelines. At the conclusion of the recommended isolation period team members can return to work when they are no longer showing symptoms.

## Responding to an incident of Covid-19 in the workplace:

If a team member is diagnosed with Covid-19:

- The team member will immediately notify the Office Manager. The Office Manager will notify the Business Manager.
- If the Public Health Service has not already notified SPT of a confirmed case Admin will notify Public Health by phoning 1800 671 738
- The clinic will close immediately for cleaning and disinfecting
- Access to affected areas in the building may be restricted until cleaning and disinfecting is completed
- Other team members in the clinic will self-isolate & get tested

Public Health will provide further instructions. These instructions may include:

- steps for notifying clients who have been in contact with the affected person.
- providing contact tracers with contact information of people who have spent time in the clinic during the affected time period
- working with Public Health to coordinate appropriate communication with:
  - team members
  - clients
  - other visitors to the clinic
  - other people who work in the building
  - the public (if necessary)

If we are notified that a 'confirmed case' has attended the clinic within the affected timeframe, we will follow instructions provided by Public Health.

## If the clinic needs to close due to Covid-19

The clinic may need to close temporarily due to Covid-19. This may happen if:

- A confirmed case has attended the clinic
- A community outbreak occurs that may pose a risk to SPT team members or clients. In this case, the Director may decide to close the clinic temporarily.

If the clinic needs to close temporarily due to Covid-19:

- Therapists will be encouraged to work from home where possible
- One admin team member may be asked to continue working in the clinic if it is safe to do so. Remaining admin team members may work from home.
- Clients will be offered telepractice where appropriate.
- The Building Manager will direct cleaning staff if cleaning and disinfecting is required. This will depend on the reason for closure and Public Health directives.

## Support mechanisms

The steps SPT will take to care for team members in isolation/quarantine or who are working from home for long periods of time are outlined on page 4 of our [Working From Home policy](#). Team members are encouraged to discuss any concerns they have with the Office Manager.

## Re-opening the clinic

The Director, in consultation with the Business Manager, will decide when to re-open the clinic. This may be in consultation with the Public Health Service. Coming back to the clinic to work will be decided in consultation with the Business Manager and Office Manager. Returning to the clinic may take place gradually. Team members will understand the need for:

- gradual return of the entire team
- staggered-return staffing arrangements
- capacity limits within the building
- physical distancing measures.

The number of people in the clinic may need to be limited. Arrangements for limiting the number of people in the clinic will include:

- a staggered return by therapists rather than all returning at once
- a mix of working from home and in the clinic
- continuing telepractice for some clients when therapists return to the clinic

## Supporting resources:

WorkSafe Tasmania [Covid Safe Workplaces Framework](#)

WorkSafe Tasmania [CHECKLIST-How to keep your workers safe and limit the spread of COVID](#)

WorkSafe Tasmania [COVID Safe Workplace Guidelines: Health Care Industry](#)

Speech Pathology Australia [Guidance for service delivery, clinical procedures and infection control during COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Safe Work Australia [Talking to clients about Covid-19](#)

WorkSafe Tasmania [“Covid Safe Workplace Guidelines Reviewing and updating your Covid-19 safety plan”](#)

WorkSafe Tasmania [“Additional Information for your existing Covid-19 safety plan”](#)