

IACP COVID-19 Return-to-work Guidelines for Members

Valid as of 22nd May 2020

Counsellors and psychotherapists can be considered part of Social Care, which is an essential service when Government and NPHEP protocols and guidance on social distancing are followed. The decision to meet clients face-to-face or through remote means is solely at the judgement of the individual counsellor/psychotherapist.

It is appreciated that significant planning may be required to move to a new model of operating with the challenges of COVID-19. However, it is the responsibility of employers and self-employed persons to apply a risk-based approach to returning to work and to prepare to apply the precautions necessary to comply fully with the public health advice.

This document is intended to consolidate practical guidance that is available at time of writing on how to manage business continuity for counsellors and psychotherapists during the COVID-19 pandemic. It addresses risks to both therapists and the public. It draws from other already published documents which are acknowledged in this document.

This guide will assist therapists to implement the Return to Work Safely Protocol for employers and workers, which applies to all workplaces right across the economy. It is recommended to review the Return to Work Safely Protocol on a regular basis, which is available under: <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>

This guide incorporates current advice about measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHEP), therefore it should be noted that this is a living document, recommendations are non-exhaustive and are subject to change.

All IACP Members who are considering re-opening their face-to-face practice must develop and/or update a COVID-19 Response Plan.

The Covid19 Response Plan must:

- Include an updated Safety Statement.
- Include an updated Risk Assessment.
- Include Staff induction and training programme(s).
- Consider each employee/therapist's individual risk factors (e.g. age, presence of underlying medical conditions, etc.).
- Include in the plan a response plan to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19.
- Include the controls necessary to address the risks identified.
- Include contingency measures to address increased rates of worker absenteeism, implementation of the measures necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, changing work patterns, etc.
- Develop plans in consultation with workers and communicate once finalised.

The new Standard Operating Procedures for a practice should include:

- Protocols for practice staff (if applicable).
- Protocols for the management of clients in the practice.
- Hygiene and health protocols.
- Cleaning and disinfection protocols.

The Standard Operating Procedures must be developed around staff operations and the client journey. It will be individual to each practice and informed by the pertaining circumstances including location, staffing, layout, and equipment.

Before returning to work, the following pre-return to work steps should be put in place and completed by employers:

Establish and issue a pre-return to work form for workers to complete at least 3 days in advance of the return to work. This form should seek confirmation that the worker, to the best of their knowledge, has no symptoms of COVID-19 and confirm that the worker is not self-isolating or awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test. Please find a link to the template at the end of this document.

- Provide an induction training for all workers (details of the training are provided in the Return to Work Safety Protocol).
- Arrange for the putting in place of the necessary controls identified in the risk assessment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Implement temperature testing in line with Public Health advice (*on 13th May 2020 IBEC confirmed that the only workplaces that require temperature testing are Residential Care Homes*).

To assist with the return to work, employers can find details of existing supports and resources in place for businesses impacted by COVID-19 at:

<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Supports-for-businesses-COVID-19.html>

As per The Return to Work Safely Protocol, workers must:

- complete and return the pre-return to work form before they return to work.
- inform their employer if there are any other circumstances relating to COVID-19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to allow their safe return to work.
- self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they have any COVID-19 symptoms.
- stay out of work until all symptoms have cleared following self-isolation.
- participate in any induction training provided by the employer on their return to the workplace.
- complete any temperature testing as implemented by the employer and in line with Public Health advice (if applicable)

Please note that members operating a private practice and are not employing any staff must personally adhere to the above pre-return to work preparations.

Guidelines for dealing with clients:

When travelling to and from the practice where you work, ensure you have an email/letter from your employer stating that you are providing an essential service. If you are self-employed, please write a letter in your own name declaring the provision of an essential service as a reason for travel.

Therapy - Reception/waiting room (if applicable)

- Methodology to control traffic in and out of the practice, in line with your practice safety policy.
- Regular cleaning and disinfection of all areas contacted by clients (surfaces, furniture etc.).
- Floor markings at reception indicating 2m social distance.
- Separate seating to maintain required social distance.
- Hand sanitizer must be provided at entry and exit.
- Ensure all non-essential items are removed from the waiting room and practice.
- Place appropriate signage at the entrance to the practice.

Making an appointment

- When arranging an appointment, it is important to explain to the client what will happen and how (this may be different than when they attended in the past) and conduct a COVID-19 pre-screening.
- Provide patients with a confirmation email, or an appointment letter, that they can carry with them when travelling to and from their appointment.

Client arrival

- Ask the client to remain in their car prior to their appointment and you will call them to enter when it is safe to do so. Ensure that you notify them of this prior to appointment.
- The therapy room is to be arranged so that there is at least 2 metres distance between the client and therapist.
- The client is required to use Hand sanitiser.
- Reconfirm COVID-19 risk assessment with the client.
- Where possible bring client straight into the therapeutic room.
- Assure sufficient time between appointments in order to avoid any overlap and allow time for infection control procedures.

Vulnerable clients

Consideration should be given to clients in a vulnerable group (older, immunocompromised or unwell) and if face-to-face option is in their interest.

Clients should not attend face-to-face session if:

- The client has developed even mild symptoms or has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- The client had first-hand contact with an individual who is diagnosed with COVID-19 or has even mild symptoms of COVID-19.
- The client has been advised to self-isolate (for example: if they just arrived in the country).

Therapy room

- Hand hygiene of client is essential; advise client to wash hands/use hand sanitiser.
- You may consider offering the client the use of a mask to provide further protection.
- Therapist must use appropriate PPE and observe hand hygiene.
- Good hygiene protocols for furniture and any equipment must be practised.
- Minimise close contact as much as possible.
- Room(s) is(are) to be cleaned/disinfected between clients

APPENDIX

Additional resources

Return to Work Safely protocol

- <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.html>
- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/safetywellbeing/healthsafetyand%20wellbeing/safetystatementsandriskassessments.html>

Posters and info HSE

- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

WHO online course

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/training/online-training>
- [https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19/return to work safely templates and checklists/return to work safely templates and checklists.html](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19/return%20to%20work%20safely%20templates%20and%20checklists/return%20to%20work%20safely%20templates%20and%20checklists.html)

Information on PPE

[https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Personal Protective Equipment - PPE/](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Topics/Personal%20Protective%20Equipment%20-%20PPE/)

Cleaning

[https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Environmental-persistence-ofSARS CoV 2-virus-Options-for-cleaning2020-03-26_0.pdf](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Environmental-persistence-ofSARS-CoV-2-virus-Options-for-cleaning2020-03-26_0.pdf)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) posters and resources

- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

Templates

Return to Work Form	Word PDF
COVID-19 Response Plan Word (currently unavailable)	PDF

Employer Checklists

Checklist 1: Planning and Preparing	Word PDF
Checklist 2: Control Measures to Prevent Infection	Word PDF
Checklist 3: COVID-19 Induction	Word PDF
Checklist 4: Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19	Word PDF
Checklist 5: Cleaning and Disinfection	Word PDF

Employee Checklist

Checklist 6: Workers	Word PDF
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Worker Representative(s) Checklist

Checklist 7: Worker Representative(s) Checklist	Word PDF
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This document has been drafted based on the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol and should be read in conjunction with the Return to Work Safety Protocol.