



Guidance on resuming in-person work with patients

The UK Government has issued modified guidance relating to the coronavirus lockdown in England. This is a positive indication that the initial COVID-19 spike has passed. However, there may be a second wave, and while there is no vaccine, the virus is still just as contagious and potentially fatal.

The UK Government's 'most recent advice is that **you should continue to work from home wherever possible**. This means continuing to work remotely with your patients or clients as many of you have managed to do.

There may be circumstances where this is not possible, and it is important to note that not all patients who need treatment can access it remotely. If you are working in-person, or thinking of returning to working in this way, you should consider the factors below:

- The needs and safety of your patient and their family;
- Your needs and safety and those of your household/ dependents;
- The needs of your colleagues at work;
- The context of the service including patients, other professionals and premises;
- Whether other options are possible and the ethical and practical risks of any decision;
- The known risk factors of age and any pre-existing health conditions for both yourself and your patient and their family members;
- Patients with particular needs who may not be able to engage using online platforms;
- If your patients could be putting themselves at risk during the journey to and from your premises, and if this may apply to you too;
- That under the government's track-and-trace system, if you develop symptoms of the virus, you will be obliged to provide details of your patients as "contacts", and vice versa. Consent to this may be implied if you are meeting in person with patients, but might be better spelled out.

It is important to realise that returning to working in-person will not be a return to 'normal'. Anxieties about risk will remain, the context of the work be radically different, and there will be many safety measures needed for in-person work to be safe, some of which we list below.

You should work through the ethical decision-making process with your manager, team, or case holder, and also seek supervision as deciding how best to help patients not able to access remote working is complex and many factors need to be taken into account.

¹ The first part of this advice is based on guidance issued by the [BACP](#)

If you work in private practice you should carefully consider all the points raised below and discuss issues with your supervisor or within a peer supervision group. In addition to this, if you feel that there are matters that need further discussion please contact the ACP at admin@childpsychotherapy.org.uk

General advice on working in-person

All members should use their professional judgement and assess risk in order to fulfil their duty of care to patients and themselves. They should do so in a way that is informed by the relevant guidance and the values and principles of the profession and our professional standards. Our Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics states that "patients' welfare and best interests are paramount", and questions relating to Member conduct will always be considered in the context of the situation. Members need to work cooperatively with colleagues to keep people safe, to practice in line with the most up to date guidance from government, to recognise and work within the limits of their competence, and, if in independent practice, to have appropriate indemnity arrangements.

The [NHS guidance on coronavirus](#) continues to provide information on what you can do to prevent the spread of the virus and actions to take if you have any symptoms.

Measures to reduce the risk of transmission that should be considered:

- Washing your hands before and after seeing patients and cleaning surfaces touched such as doorknobs at the start and end of every session;
- How to ensure that patients, parents/carers, and all staff can all stay an appropriate distance from each other at all times;
- Having sanitiser, wipes, gloves and masks available for use by yourself and/or patients and using them when needed;
- How can you ensure that patients do not touch anything in the premises outside the treatment room, and that they wash/sanitise their hands when they arrive, and when they move between rooms in the premises (sanitiser may have to be available in every room)?
- Is it realistic for patients or parents/carers to wait in the premises? Can they wait outside and be called/texted when the session is to start?
- Is it realistic for patients or parents/carers to use the toilet safely?
- How to reduce the risk of transmission through surfaces that can be touched, including temporary suspension of shared, or possibly any toys, and deep cleaning or changing covering of soft furnishing between patients, or their replacement with wipe-clean furnishings;
- Will sessions have to be shortened to allow time for cleaning between patients?
- Can sessions be timed to reduce the risk of patients being less than 2m apart?
- How can the premises be deep-cleaned in line with government guidance (use of UVC lighting left on overnight can help);
- What your patients should do if they experience symptoms of the virus, or think there is a risk they might have contracted it?
- A plan for the possible eventuality that you are unable to continue to provide in-person therapy.

Further advice for those in employment

- Members employed in NHS or other services should ensure that they are familiar with and follow their Trust/employer's policy. If you are uncomfortable with it then seek advice from Eve Grainger (ACP Employment Standards Group), Julia Mikardo or Danny Goldberger (ACP's Union reps) on admin@childpsychotherapy.org.uk as well as your local union rep (who can be found via your HR department).
- The BPS has issued [guidance for employers](#) to support a safe and thoughtful 'return to work'.
- NHS managers in particular may be under some pressure to 'get back to normal' and start clearing waiting lists etc, but ACP members should understand that patient and staff safety is a priority.
- Employers should be conducting individual risk-assessments with staff in order to reach a decision about whether it is safe for them to return to in-person working.