

FAQ Related to Reopening Massage Therapy Businesses in NH
Last updated May 6, 2020

1. What is COVID-19?

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>

2. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/symptoms-causes/syc-20479963>

3. Can I practice massage therapy in the State of NH?

On March 26, 2020, Governor Sununu issued Emergency Order #17 Stay-at-Home Order. This order required the closing of all non-essential businesses including massage therapy practices.

[https://www.nheconomy.com/NHEconomy/media/NH-Economy/2020-0-Emergency-Order-\(1\)-17_1.pdf](https://www.nheconomy.com/NHEconomy/media/NH-Economy/2020-0-Emergency-Order-(1)-17_1.pdf)

Here is a link to Exhibit A to Emergency Order #17 – “...a list of industry sectors that provide essential services and support to COVID-19 and the core mission of the State.”

https://www.nheconomy.com/NHEconomy/media/NH-Economy/Exhibit-A-to-Emergency-Order-17_2.pdf

On May 1, 2020, Governor Sununu issued Emergency Order #40 Exhibits A-D Stay-at-Home Order 2.0, which allowed some business sectors to begin to reopen. Massage therapy practices remain closed under this order.

<https://businesshelp.nheconomy.com/hc/en-us/articles/360047733253-5-1-2020-Governor-Chris-Sununu-Issues-Stay-at-Home-Order-2-0>

4. Why are massage therapy services considered risky?

Massage therapy services are considered high risk because we have direct, person-to-person, sustained contact with our clients in a closed environment. This creates the greatest opportunity for disease transmission given what is currently known about COVID-19 and how it passes between people both symptomatic and asymptomatic.

5. How do I assess risk within my own practice?

Here is a link to a publication from John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health – Center for Health Security dated April 17, 2020 to help inform you on how to assess risk as you consider reopening.

https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200417-reopening-guidance-governors.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1zWY262dcRyyAn8Kri9cwhRMvzTs0Pi6uugSewHRka_Qai1a6vIWSmaK
[A](#)

What is important for each of us to consider is that even with potential modifications, we will have to accept and be comfortable with a certain level of risk if we opt to provide massage therapy services. While this is something we have all considered to some degree upon entering the field of massage, COVID-19 is unique in that it is a novel virus and as such the information we do have is relatively new and constantly in flux. Thus, our ability to accurately assess risk also changes as the public health, scientific, and medical fields evolve in their understanding of COVID-19. Direct contact between practitioner and client is universal to all hands on massage therapy services, yet the environments we practice in and how we deliver our services varies. In my opinion, it is in these two areas, where mitigation protocols and procedures can potentially reduce risk.

6. What steps can I take to potentially mitigate risks so I can return to practicing massage therapy?

When thinking about how to best mitigate risk, there are three primary pieces to consider – you, your client, and your business (environment and how you conduct business).

You outside of your office: Things to consider are limiting your potential exposure to COVID-19 outside of your practice. This may require you to remain as isolated as possible when not working. If you live with others, you may need to consider whom they are exposed to and their frequency of exposure. Basically, thinking about and being honest about what you are personally bringing into the office and in direct contact with your clients.

You at your office: Things to consider are changing your clothes upon arrival to the office and then changing your shirt between clients; wearing PPE (masks, gloves) while working with clients and/or at all times; taking your temperature daily; access testing on a weekly basis to determine your own COVID-19 status; and constantly/consistently washing hands or using hand sanitizer.

You inside and outside of your office: Something to consider is keeping a log of whom you have contact with and where you have been so you can provide that information if necessary for contact tracing.

Your client outside of your office: It would be amazing to think that we can control others' behaviors and trust they are reporting accurately to you their potential exposure but humans are humans and we have NO control over their actions and behaviors. So let's just accept that and move on. 📄

Your client at your office: Things to consider are asking them a series of screening questions to determine exposure and your comfort in pursuing treatment; taking their temperature; asking them to wear a mask; and encouraging frequent use of hand sanitizer.

Your business: Things to consider are creating a robust cleaning/sanitation/disinfecting protocol and checklist that you consistently perform at the beginning of your day, between clients, and at the end of your day (this should include but not limited to all highly touched surfaces or ones where respiratory droplets may have landed); having a procedure for handling clean and used linens; using protective coverings on table, face cradle, and pillows that can be wiped down after each client; using touch free soap, hand sanitizer, and paper towel dispensers; using an air ventilation/purifier; limiting as much contact as possible during your intake, payment, and scheduling processes; allowing sufficient time between clients for cleaning and reducing the potential for overlap; removing non-essential items not easily cleaned from treatment and

waiting areas; limiting services to those with less potential risk and/or altering services to reduce risk of exposure (hands, face, etc.); and really looking at any other aspect of how you practice and engage with your clients where the potential for virus transmission exists.

Important Note: You will encounter multiple perspectives around what is necessary to mitigate risk. Please do your due diligence and research reliable sources to determine what you might need and what will be most effective. It is also highly likely some pieces discussed above will be dictated to us by Governor Sununu's orders and guidelines.

7. OK, I am willing and able to take the necessary precautions to practice massage therapy, now what?

You should begin by developing the appropriate guidelines, procedures, and protocols (write them down). The next step is all about clarifying expectations for any potential clients. This may mean emailing or calling them directly as well as updating your websites, social media, posting gentle reminders around your office, etc. Prior to reopening you will need to obtain any of the "stuff" that you have identified above as necessary (i.e. PPE, cleaning supplies, general supplies). After that, it is truly all about consistently implementing and following your guidelines, procedures, and protocols.

8. How much time should I allow between massage appointments?

Long gone are the days of quick room turnovers. It is recommended to allow at least 30-minutes between massage appointments. This alleviates client-to-client exposure as well as gives you sufficient time to wrap up one session, schedule, collect payment, change linens, clean, change clothes, refuel, and be ready with a smile on your face (under your mask) when your next client arrives.

9. I have done all that I can to minimize the risk of exposure to my clients and me. What if clients don't feel safe receiving massage?

This is tricky to answer, as receiving massage in the era of COVID-19 requires a higher level of trust than previously established in the therapeutic relationships with our clients. All we can really do is reassure our clients we are taking all necessary precautions to mitigate risk and openly share our protocols and procedures verbally and/or on our websites, printouts around the office, etc. Our clients will have to decide what level of risk they are willing to accept. Remember they only know for certain what they have been doing. Coming to our offices and receiving massage requires them to trust that we are doing our part inside and outside of our offices. For some, that may be hard despite our past relationship with them and all our reassurances. I encourage you to honor their choices without judgment or frustration towards them or yourselves. We are all navigating new territory with COVID-19.

10. Will I have access to COVID-19 testing?

It is unclear at this time if we will have regular access to testing or not in order to determine our personal COVID-19 status. However, given our direct contact with clients, I believe it is something that we as a profession should strongly advocate for.

11. I am the primary caretaker of a high-risk family member and/or I'm high-risk myself. I am afraid to go back to work too soon. Will I still be able to get unemployment benefits?

You can find the most up-to-date information related to unemployment in NH at the following link...

<https://businesshelp.nheconomy.com/hc/en-us/categories/360003372634-UNEMPLOYMENT-LAYOFFS>

12. Can my employer fire me if I don't go back to work when they open and I am?

Please see the answer above.

13. Why were we put on the non-essential list to begin with?

Without knowing the exact answer to this question, I can venture a guess that it had to do with preserving PPE for our essential healthcare workers as well as concern over spreading COVID-19 through our direct contact with clients. While other professions may share similar interactions with their patients/clients, I cannot speak to why they are deemed "essential" and not us. For those who are concerned about this designation, I encourage you to reach out to your State Representatives and/or the NH Chapter of AMTA.

14. I live in the Northern NH or in a town that has no COVID-19 positive cases. Why can't I open?

Again, it is hard to know the specifics of why but my understanding is in order to control the spread of a virus, which has created a global pandemic, it is best practice to take a statewide approach. We are fortunate in NH and to have places within our state seemingly unaffected by COVID-19. But given the limited testing that has existed to date and the likelihood of asymptomatic carriers, COVID-19 may be/have been more prevalent than we are aware of. Governor Sununu with guidance from the NH Economic Re-Opening Task Force as well as other Government, State, and Health Officials will determine how and when we will be given the green light to reopen our practices.

Here is a link to the task force... <https://www.nheconomy.com/reopeningtaskforce>

15. What are we to do when all the vacationers come back to the state wanting to book appointments for massage?

Some of this will undoubtedly be dictated by Governor Sununu's orders and guidelines in place at the time of such a request. If there are no restrictions, you retain the right to refuse any client. Only you can assess the potential risks and choose to accept them or not. I strongly encourage you to follow a similar risk assessment process as recommended above to determine what is right for you and your practice.

16. Do I have to wear a mask, gloves, gown, and goggles during the massage?

At the time of this completed document, masks are the only requirement and a change of top for each session. But, as stated above, some of this may be dictated by Governor Sununu's orders and guidelines in order for us to reopen. We will have to adhere to those orders as a minimum standard of practice. Anything beyond that will be your choice.

17. Will I be limited like the hair stylists in what services I can offer my clients?

At the time of this completed document, techniques offered within the scope of practice as a massage/bodywork practitioner will be left at the discretion of the licensee.

18. Where can I find a list of how to set up my office?

We are fortunate in that a couple of our professional organizations are offering guidance on this.

ABMP gives a comprehensive Back to Practice guide to follow... <https://www.abmp.com/back-to-practice>

AMTA also has a list of resources... <https://www.amtamassage.org/about/news/covid-19-resources-for-massage-therapists/>

Reminder: These are only guides. Please review carefully Governor Sununu's orders and guidelines once they are released in conjunction with your own risk assessment to determine how to set up your office.

19. What do I need to include on a new health intake form?

This will ultimately be specific and unique to your office and clientele. The intention of the COVID-19 related questions are to allow you to assess risk of exposure. So include those questions you deem necessary to make an informed assessment and decision to treat.

An example of what you might include can be found at... *Diana Thompson, LMT link:* [COVID-19 intake questions](#)

20. Will my liability insurance cover me if a client contracts COVID-19 and says I gave it to them?

From the AMTA: We also know many of you have questions about your liability insurance coverage when you begin to see clients again. As long as you are practicing legally and in accordance with federal, state and facility guidelines, your AMTA liability insurance will cover you as it always does.

21. What does the industry say and why haven't professional organizations like AMTA or ABMP fought for us to open sooner?

Both the AMTA and ABMP have been very active in getting relevant information out to us. Their job is to inform but not dictate practice. We encourage visiting their websites to see what they are saying and doing.

<https://www.amtamassage.org/about/news/covid-19-resources-for-massage-therapists/>

<https://www.abmp.com/covid-updates>

List of Suggested Supplies

- Masks (for practitioner and client) – It is unclear whether or not cloth face coverings will be adequate or if we will be asked to wear a surgical mask. From everything I have read, N95 or similar types of respirator masks will not be required unless you are at high risk for complications from a COVID-19 infection.

<https://www.sfcddp.org/communicable-disease/healthy-habits/how-to-put-on-and-remove-a-face-mask/>

- Gloves – The recommendation might be for us to wear gloves when working on a client's hands or face. Some practitioners may also choose to wear gloves for handling used linens and during your cleaning/sanitation process. Gloves are most effective when used as a barrier. So if you have any concern about the integrity of your skin (which may be compromised from all the hand washing and use of hand sanitizer), please wear gloves.

<https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/poster-how-to-remove-gloves.pdf>

- Changes of Clothes – Since we know COVID-19 can live on surfaces for a period of time, changing your clothes (top or apron at a minimum) after each client is strongly encouraged. You may also consider wearing a separate change of clothes to and from your office, than what you wear to during your massage sessions.

<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/ppe-sequence.pdf>

- Hand Sanitizer – Have access to hand sanitizer in each room. You may also want to consider using a hands free dispenser.

<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/hand-sanitizer-factsheet.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>

- Disposable or Re-useable Vinyl Face Cradle Coverings – Basically, you want to be able to wipe the surface of your face cradle. Depending on the material your face cradle is made from, it may not hold up well to repeated use of cleaners directly on it.
- Vinyl Table Cover (essential if using fleece pad and/or a table warmer) and Vinyl Pillow Covers - Same reasoning as above.
- Full Set of Massage Linens and Blanket for each session – Like with our clothing, anything that has come in contact with you or your client during a massage session should be changed. Follow similar handling recommendations to donning and doffing your clothing. The intention is to contain any potential virus containing droplets. Do not flick or shake out your linens.

- Washable Container with Lid for Linens – Have one container for clean linens and another for used linens. Clean daily. Another option would be to place your clean linens as sets into individual plastic bags for storage and for used linens, place them into a large hamper with a lid lined with a plastic bag. The goal/intention is to keep your clean linens stored in a way that keeps them from being contaminated and your used linens contained so they don't contaminate.
- Washable Container for Client's Clothing – It may be worth considering using a washable container for clients to place their clothing in during their massage session. This might help reduce the amount of surfaces their clothing comes in contact with while they are in your office.
- Foot Pedal Trash Can – Making your office as hands free as possible is advised. It is also advised to have trash cans with lids to contain items that are potentially contaminated.
- Hands Free Dispensers for Hand Sanitizer, Soap, and Paper Towels – The reasoning is the same as previously stated. Creating opportunities for less direct contact is recommended.
- Touchless Thermometer – This may or may not be recommended by Governor Sununu in his orders and guidelines.
- Cleaning Products – Make sure you are using cleaning products safely and as recommended for the different surfaces in your office.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

- HEPA Air Purifiers – Not recommended at this time.

<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/will-air-purifier-protect-me-and-my-family-covid-19-my-home>