

Returning to the Home: A Guide for Early Intervention and Home Health Physical Therapists (PTs)



Providing services during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which providers have no control over cleanliness, ventilation, and presence of visitors or other family members in the service environment, can be alarming. Many natural environments used by home health (HH) and early intervention (EI) therapists, such as playgrounds, parks, pools, trampoline parks, and indoor playground areas have been closed. As these environments reopen to the public, providers must consider the risks for COVID-19 exposure associated with using these environments, the needs of their clients and families, and their own safety.

In order to protect the children receiving services and the service providers, being knowledgeable regarding state, national and global recommendations for self-protection and protection is paramount. Recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO) and the Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) should be consulted for the latest healthcare practitioner recommendations. Both, HH and EI programs have been operational during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Providers should look to their individual agencies for specific guidelines and be aware of appropriate contacts to gain information. Providers may also consult the *Telehealth versus Face-to-Face Decision Guide* when determining the best option for service delivery.

General Considerations (Home, Daycares & Other Natural Environments)

Safety Considerations- All Environments

Hygiene

- [Hand washing](#)
- Use of [cloth face covering](#) for children over 2 years of age and adults in close contact within the treatment area
- Use of cloth face coverings for any other adults in the treatment area who will be in close contact.
- Use of a surgical mask and eye protection/face shield if child not able to mask, following CDC guidance for [direct service providers](#)
- Consider use of a communicator or alternative masks so child can read lips and see your facial expressions
- [Cleaning protocols](#), [schedules](#) and [EPA approved cleaners](#).
- Tablets, if notes are completed in house, should be cleaned according to CDC guidelines.
- If anything is brought into the house, it should be placed on a paper towel which is discarded when leaving the house
- Limit use of materials – best practice in EI suggests that interventionists work with what is already in the child’s home. HH therapists should attempt to limit toys and equipment brought into the home. Any toys and equipment brought into the house should be cleaned according to CDC guidelines.
- Clothing –if a therapist’s clothing comes into close contact with the child’s nose, mouth, or bodily fluids, the therapist should change clothes prior to the next visit. Therapist may consider using a disposal gown when working with clients who are unable to wear a mask.

Pre-visit Safety and Screenings Considerations

- Check [infection trends](#) in your area
- Consider a pre-visit screening questionnaire for child and anyone in household
- Consider taking the child's temperature with a no-touch thermometer, consider pulse oximetry

Social Distancing Considerations

- If seeing a child in day care, consider using a space that allows you the greatest distance from other adults and children; consider using the outdoors.
- If seeing a child in the home, consider asking the family to limit visitors during your treatment time.
- In all environments, ensure adequate ventilation in space (utilizing outdoor spaces when feasible)
- Use Daycare and Head Start CDC [Guidelines](#)

Equity Considerations

- See [equity resources](#) from Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center
- Consider recommendations for infants and young children with [hearing loss](#)
- Consider revised use of therapy staff according to risk and service delivery - e.g. feeding and self-care
- Training or reinforcement on signs of social and emotional trauma, abuse and neglect identification and reporting

Practice Considerations

- Training in signs of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children ([MIS-C](#)) in children
- Increased accessibility of environments for children with disabilities
- Visual supports for practice (use of pictures for safety reminders, video modeling of appropriate behaviors, infographics for parents about HH and EI PT services during pandemic)
- Dosing strategies to limit further skill regression
- Use resources on assisting and training parents in helping their child(ren) in wearing masks, practicing safe hygiene practices and cleaning their home (if receptive)

Documentation Considerations

- Careful contact tracing documentation for all staff, clients
- Type and use of face coverings
- Checklist for safety considerations (when temperatures taken, symptom checklist, hand washing between clients, cleaning protocols of space)
- Needed supplies (tissues, masks, face shields, disinfecting wipes, gloves, no-touch thermometer)

Questions to Consider When Deciding to See a Child in a Daycare

1. Is staff masked? Are other children?
2. How many people will you and the child be in contact with and for how long? The greater the number of people you and the child are exposed to and the greater the time (more than 15 minutes in close contact), the greater the risk
3. How is hand hygiene be enforced?
4. How is social distancing be enforced?
5. Are staff and children who are symptomatic be encouraged to stay home?
6. Are the health of staff and children screened on a regular basis?

7. Are I staff or children who have visited areas with high infection rates quarantined before returning?
8. Is there a space you can work either outdoors or at least have a window opened?
9. Are all children encouraged to practice respiratory etiquette?
10. Is the flow of people designed to minimize contact?
11. Are there visual cues on where children should stand to maintain social distancing?
12. Is frequent hand washing encouraged?
13. How frequently are surfaces and toys washed?

Resources:

Healthcare Providers Service Organization (HPSO). HPSO Physical Therapy Spotlight: Home Care in the Time of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Accessed August 13, 2020. [http://www.hpso.com/risk-education/individuals/articles/HPSO-Physical-Therapy-Spotlight-Home-Care-in-the-Time-of-the-Novel-Coronavirus-\(COVID-19\)](http://www.hpso.com/risk-education/individuals/articles/HPSO-Physical-Therapy-Spotlight-Home-Care-in-the-Time-of-the-Novel-Coronavirus-(COVID-19))

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