

Current Best Practices During COVID

There are lots of factors to consider when deciding to see someone in person or via telehealth. Providers need to consider complicated, ethical, professional and personal needs. WMHCA encourages providers to look to their local government and CDC as well when making these decisions.

There are no current legal standards in Washington state regarding when a therapist can see clients via telehealth or in person. This means we rely on our ethical codes and clinical judgment. Ethical codes state the decision to see someone in person or via telehealth should be made on a case by case basis for what is in the best interest of the client. Document your decision-making process in the clinical note.

If you choose to have 100% telehealth practice make sure you have referrals for in person therapists because telehealth won't be appropriate for every client.

If you see a client in person you must minimize risk. You need to document you talked with your client about the potential risk and benefits of in person vs telehealth. Document this in the chart.

Some of the guidelines regarding seeing clients in person may include:

- Keep a log of your temperature. Check it at least once a day before interacting with clients.
- Screen clients over the phone before they come into the building. Here is a [guideline](#) from DOH regarding screening clients and staff.
- Both you and your clients should be wearing masks until the DOH provides specific guidance allowing healthcare providers and patients to stop wearing mask in healthcare settings. If you or your client can't safely wear a mask, document why it's not safe or clinically feasible and what alternative precautions you are taking.
- Clients should never be in the building simultaneously unless they are members of the same household isolating together.
- Schedule sufficient time to clean and disinfect as appropriate between each client.
- Encourage frequent hand washing and have alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Do not use a waiver of liability – instead, ensure clients understand the risks and benefits of in-person services and understand the procedures to minimize the risk of exposure.
- At this point, fully vaccinated individuals can meet indoors without masks, but this does not apply to healthcare settings.
- We can not condition our healthcare services on a client's vaccination status..
- Do not ask for proof of vaccination, rather, ask the client just to confirm that they are fully vaccinated.
- You can decide not to see un-vaccinated individuals.
- If you are seeing un-vaccinated people continue to follow all pre-vaccination protocols. If clients cannot wear a mast, document why it's not safe or clinically

- feasible, and document what steps you are taking to minimize risk.
- If clients don't want to comply with your policies and safety procedures it's okay to refer them elsewhere and let them know you can't provide treatment.

Telehealth Tips for people who receive services can be found [here](#).

Check insurance websites often regarding billing procedure changes. Some companies are allowing for audio only and the instructions are on their website regarding billing.

WMHCA has direct link to many insurance companies on our website www.wmhca.org.

Washington state also requires providers to post signage encouraging staff, visitors and patients to practice frequent hand hygiene with soap and water or hand sanitizer, avoid touching their face, and practice cough etiquette. Signage can be downloaded [here](#). Educate patients about COVID-19 in a language they best understand. The education should include the signs, symptoms, and risk factors associated with COVID-19 and how to prevent its spread.

If someone in your office tests positive you must report to your [local health department](#).

These recommendations are based information the Department of Health, the Center for Disease Control, Department of Behavioral Health and Recovery, the Health Care Authority, and a workshop from Eric Strom.