Interim guidance on infection control in osteopathy during COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction
The GOsC has issued this interim guidance on infection control in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is informed by government guidance and will be subject to change as advice and the context changes.

Guidance
The Osteopathic Practice Standards provide as follows:

**Standard C5** states: ‘You must ensure that your practice is safe, clean and hygienic, and complies with health and safety legislation.’

The associated guidance provides that

1. Your practice premises must be clean, safe, hygienic, comfortable and appropriately equipped.

2. There are detailed requirements in law for health and safety in the workplace. Further details can be found on the website of the [UK Health and Safety Executive](https://www.hse.gov.uk).


4. You should ensure that you have appropriate procedures in place in the event of a medical emergency.

5. You should take all necessary steps to control the spread of communicable diseases.’

**Standard D11** states: ‘You must ensure that any problems with your own health do not affect your patients. You must not rely on your own assessment of the risk to patients.

The associated guidance states:

‘1. If you know or suspect that your physical or mental health is impaired in a way that might affect the care you give to patients, you must:

1.1 seek and follow appropriate medical advice on whether you should modify your practice and in what way

1.2 if necessary, stop practising until your medical adviser considers you fit to practise again

1.3 inform the GOsC.'
2. If you are exposed to a serious communicable disease, and you believe that you may be a carrier, you should not practise until you have received appropriate medical advice, and you should follow any advice you are given about suspending or modifying your practice. You should take all necessary precautions to prevent transmission of the condition to patients.’

**Additional guidance**

This additional guidance has been issued about infection prevention and control in healthcare settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the current emergency context of COVID-19, all osteopaths who are practising must ensure that they protect their patients and the public, themselves and others, and should ensure that they have read and implemented as appropriate, the guidance for health professionals (See GOV.UK’s [COVID-19: guidance for health professionals](https://www.gov.uk)).

Relevant points, as at 24 March 2020, include:

Make sure:

- you and your staff are aware of the updated guidance about the symptoms of COVID-19
- you apply it to yourselves
- this is publicised to patients.

Patients with COVID-19 symptoms should not be attending osteopathic clinics.

The GOV.UK guidance [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection](https://www.gov.uk) (published 24 March 2020) states:

‘The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild illness.

Patients with symptoms should be advised to self-isolate for 7 or 14 days in accordance with the stay at home guidance, the guidance explains that if you feel that you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days, then use the [NHS 111 online](https://www.nhs111.nhs.uk) coronavirus service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency can call 999.

For extremely vulnerable patients who are covered by the [Guidance on Shielding](https://www.gov.uk), they should contact these services immediately if they get symptoms.

Be aware of [the guidance on social distancing](https://www.gov.uk). Social distancing means you should:

1. ‘Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough

2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information.

4. Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs.

5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.

6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services.

Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is pragmatic.

Be aware of the specific guidance for particular groups, who are strongly advised to follow the guidance above which includes people:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (ie anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
  - chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
  - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
  - chronic kidney disease
  - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
  - chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
  - diabetes
  - problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
  - a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
  - being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
  - those who are pregnant

See GOV.UK’s Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK and protecting older people and vulnerable adults. You could consider offering video phone consultations during this time to patients, acting within the limits of your competence and referring if necessary.

**Infection control**

If your you and your patient are satisfied that a physical appointment is necessary and appropriate in accordance with this guidance, and the benefits and risks are explained, you should ensure that you have fully implemented appropriate infection control procedures at this time.
This includes

- Triaging patients over the phone prior to attendance to ensure that they do not have relevant symptoms. (See above)

- Being aware of *what to do if you are in contact with someone with suspected COVID-19*.

- Ensuring that stringent infection control procedures are in place in your practice and policies in place to reduce the transmission of any diseases. (See Guidance for infection prevention and control in healthcare settings Adapted from Pandemic Influenza: Guidance for Infection prevention and control in healthcare settings 2020 Issued jointly by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health Wales (PHW), Public Health Agency (PHA) Northern Ireland, Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and Public Health England as official guidance.) These include:

  ‘Standard infection control precautions (SICPs) are the basic infection prevention and control measures necessary to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious agents from both recognised and unrecognised sources. Sources include blood and other body fluids, secretions and excretions (excluding sweat), non-intact skin or mucous membranes, and any equipment or items in the care environment. SICPs should be used by all staff, in all care settings, at all times, for all patients.’ (See p12) Relevant aspects include:

- Assessment for infection risk (p14)
- Hand hygiene (p14)
- Respiratory and cough hygiene (p15)
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) ‘Before undertaking any procedure staff should assess any likely exposure and ensure PPE is worn that provides adequate protection against the risks associated with the procedure or task being undertaken. All staff should be trained in the proper use of all PPE that they may be required to wear.’ (p16)

- Safe management of linen (laundry) (p18)
- Staff uniforms/clothes (p19)
- Management of blood/body fluid spills (p19)
- Management of healthcare and clinical and non-clinical waste (p19)

General Osteopathic Council Interim Guidance
24 March 2020

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Changes made</th>
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<tr>
<td>19 March 2020</td>
<td>Original version</td>
<td>Matthew Redford and Chair of Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 March 2020</td>
<td>Additional statement about osteopathic practice in the current context.</td>
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<td>Guidance updated to incorporate Guidance on Shielding</td>
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