



**Fédération  
québécoise  
des massothérapeutes  
agréés**

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# **Guidelines for the resumption of massage therapy in the context of COVID-19**

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# Background

On March 22, 2020, the Government of Quebec ordered the closure of all companies offering personal care services, including massage therapy, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to limit the spread of the virus, the reopening of therapeutic care, including massage therapy, and the resumption of related activities on June 1, 2020 must be carried out in compliance with the [Interim Recommendations for Private Practice Therapeutic Care](#) issued by the INSPQ (Quebec's public health expertise and reference center) and the [Toolkit for the Therapeutic Care Sector](#) issued by the Commission des normes de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST).

In order to allow certified massage therapists across the province to safely receive clients again, the Fédération québécoise des massothérapeutes (FQM) has developed the following protocol for the resumption of professional activities by certified massage therapists.

The measures presented below apply to all certified massage therapists. Each section is intended to allow certified massage therapists to adapt their practice based on the type of setting in which they work. Note that additional hygiene, sanitation and infection prevention protocols may already be in place and may apply in certain care environments, for example in hospitals, CHSLDs (long-term care facilities) and seniors' homes, and certified massage therapists must comply with the applicable procedures.

**Note :** Wherever a feminine noun or pronoun is used in this document it shall be deemed to include the masculine gender.

## Preparation for the resumption of activities

### Reconfiguration of work premises

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- Reconfigure the work premises to comply with physical distancing measures (minimum of two metres or six feet between people at all times).
- In waiting rooms, employee rooms and other shared spaces, reduce the number of chairs and keep them far apart, or install full transparent partitions (Plexiglas) between the chairs.
- In the waiting room and the reception area, install visual markers on the floor to help ensure compliance with physical distancing measures.

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- Remove all non-essential objects, including newspapers, magazines and sample products (including in the massage room).
- In the reception area, assess the possibility of installing full transparent partitions (Plexiglas) so as to create a barrier between clients and workers.

## Appointment scheduling

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- Review appointment planning so as to provide a sufficient period between appointments (ex. 20 to 30 minutes), which will allow enough time to disinfect surfaces between clients and limit the number of workers and clients simultaneously present in the work premises.
- Consider extending company opening hours.

## Organization of work teams

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- Favour smaller work teams with maximum stability in terms of their composition.
- Avoid sharing materials, equipment and care products (ex. oil, hot stones, etc.) between therapists.
- Provide a mechanism for asymptomatic people to remove themselves from the work premises, as recommended by the [CNESST](#).

## Washroom facilities

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- Install hand sanitizer dispensers in strategic areas in the workplace (ex. at the entrance to the clinic or the massage room, in the reception area, in the washrooms, etc.) when there is no sink and no soap dispenser.
- Make paper towels or washable towels available in sufficient quantity close to the sinks, to ensure that they are used only once.
- Provide a contact-free garbage can or a plastic or fabric bag for used paper towels and towels.
- Post visual images showing the proper hand-washing and disinfection technique near the sinks and alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers. Click on the following links to view the mini-poster and poster provided by the government:
  - [Washing Hands – Simple and Effective](#) (washing hands with water and soap)
  - [Disinfecting your Hands](#) (disinfection using an alcohol-based solution)
- Post a visual image showing the proper hand and respiratory hygiene. Click on the following link to view the poster provided by the government:
  - [Coughing and sneezing without contaminating](#)

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## Method of payment and documents

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- The INSPQ recommends the use of contact-free payment options (ex. ApplePay, PayPass, Interac e-transfer) in order to limit cash payments.
- Where possible, favour the use of digital documents rather than paper.

## Materials and personal protective equipment (PPE)

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The FQM has checked with several suppliers. The suppliers capable of delivering within a reasonable timeframe while meeting high quality standards are included in our [order catalogue](#).

The following materials and personal protective equipment are recommended in massage therapy:

- Personal protective equipment (see Table on next page)
- Disinfectants and alcohol-based solutions ([list of disinfectant products approved by Health Canada for COVID-19](#))

Notes:

- Make sure to cover non-washable materials (ex. heated cover, cushions, synthetic lambswool headrest) at all times with a waterproof fabric (ex. piqué), and change the fabric between each client.
- **Caution should be exercised with heated table covers:** Use this equipment in compliance with the manufacturer's instructions. In several cases, covering it with non-breathable fabric or vinyl is not recommended and may even be dangerous.
- Personal protective equipment must be kept in a closed storage space or covered in the massage room.
- All employers are responsible for informing their employees and/or self-employed workers about the preventive measures to apply at all times on the work premises and for providing the appropriate training in connection with those measures. Please read [the tools and checklists](#) published by the CNESST.

**Table 1: Personal protective equipment for use in massage therapy**

Equipment	Massage therapist	Client	Details
<b>Procedure mask</b>	Yes	Face covering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must meet standard ASTM-F2100, with a Bacterial Filtration Efficiency of 95% or more.</li> <li>• The procedure mask should be replaced every 4 hours, or more often if it is wet, dirty or damaged (the usual lifespan for a procedure mask is 4 hours).</li> <li>• If you wear the mask for 4 hours over several non-consecutive periods, it is recommended to fold it so that the outside of the mask be folded back on itself, and place it in a paper bag or a container that is not airtight.</li> </ul> <p><b>For the client:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wearing a face covering during the entire massage therapy session is strongly recommended. Remove it with the client in a prone position if the latter has difficulty breathing. If desired, the massage therapist can also provide the client with a procedure mask.</li> </ul> <p><b>Contra-indications for the client:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Quebec recommends that “children under 2 years of age, people with respiratory difficulties, or people incapable of removing their mask or face covering without assistance from another person should not wear one.” (<a href="http://Quebec.ca">Quebec.ca</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>Eye protection</b>  <u>Options:</u> • protective goggles • visor	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Must be disinfected between each client</b></li> <li>• Eyeglasses are not deemed to provide eye protection, unless they include lateral protection. Accessories for adapting eyeglasses are available on the market.</li> </ul>
<b>Protective suit</b>  <u>Options:</u> • disposable or washable frock • short- or long-sleeve frock • uniform • T-shirt and apron	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Must be replaced between each client</b></li> <li>• If you wear short sleeves, hand hygiene must include the forearms.</li> <li>• If the suit is put on and removed from the top, remove it by rolling from the bottom to the top so that only the inside part of the suit is in contact with the face.</li> <li>• If the top part of the suit does not extend to the knees, also replace the bottom (pants or apron) between each client.</li> <li>• If the massage therapist wears an apron, the shirt must also be replaced between each client..</li> </ul>
<b>Gloves</b>	No (see details)	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the recommendations of the INSPQ, <b>“wearing gloves is not recommended</b>, as there is a risk it will promote a false sense of security and contamination through contact with multiple surfaces using gloves that have not been changed.” (2).</li> </ul>

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- In keeping with procedures already established, gloves may be appropriate under certain circumstances not related to COVID-19 (ex. immunosuppressed client, client with skin lesions, or skin lesions on the massage therapist's hands).

## Adapting appointment scheduling

### Preventive triage

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- Avoid any appointment with a client if :
  - She presents with one of more symptoms of COVID-19 (fever >38°C, recent cough or aggravated chronic cough, difficulty breathing, loss of smell without nasal congestion and with or without loss of taste, muscle pain, headaches, intense fatigue, loss of appetite, sore throat, diarrhea).
  - She has travelled outside the country in the previous 14 days.
  - She is waiting for a screening test for COVID-19 or has tested positive for it in the previous 14 days.
  - She has been in contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the previous 14 days.

Do not schedule an appointment if the client meets one of the conditions listed above.

- Please inform the client that she should not come to her appointment and ask her to call you if she develops symptoms of COVID-19 between the time the appointment is scheduled and the date of the appointment.

***Note: At all times, the massage therapist must avoid seeing a client who presents symptoms of COVID-19 or meets one of the criteria listed above.***

### Cancellation policy

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Inform the client that she must cancel her appointment if she develops symptoms of COVID-19. It is preferable not to apply your cancellation policy in this case so as to avoid giving the client an incentive to show up for the massage with symptoms in order to avoid losing money.

## People at risk of severe forms of COVID-19

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Public health authorities have not issued recommendations for therapeutic care dispensed to people at risk of developing severe forms of COVID-19. However, the FQM urges you to exercise caution and sound judgment. When in doubt, we recommend that you postpone the appointment or request a medical note.

### Categories of people at greater risk of developing a severe form of COVID-19:

- people with a suppressed immune system
- people with chronic uncontrolled diseases, such as diabetes and heart, lung or kidney disease
- people aged 70 and over

For further details on risk factors for the severe form of COVID-19, please view the [INSPQ](#) publication on the subject.

**Note:** The presence of such risks in a person does not mean that they are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19. However, if they do contract the virus, they could be at greater risk of developing a severe form of the disease, suffering complications, or dying.

### Speak to the client to foster greater awareness:

- Advise the client that she is part of a category of people who are a greater risk of developing a severe form of COVID-19.
- Inform the client about the sanitary measures established in compliance with the recommendations of public health authorities in order to avoid transmission of the coronavirus (ex. if the massage therapist is an asymptomatic carrier).
- If the client still wishes to schedule the appointment and you want to protect yourself, please inform the client that she will be required to sign a waiver prior to receiving the massage (next section).

## Professional liability waiver (optional)

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This document is a tool offered to certified massage therapists to provide them with legal protection. While the waiver does not offer complete protection, it can exert a significant impact on the proceedings in the event of legal action.

If you use the waiver, it is preferable to explain it to the client when scheduling the appointment, while emphasizing the measures that have been established to comply with the recommendations of public health authorities.

**Exclusive access on the Members' Portal** : [Click here](#) or copy this link into your browser:

<https://extranet.fqm.qc.ca/content/les-questionnaires-sant%C3%A9>

## Technicalities

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- Ask the client to show up on time for the appointment so as to avoid being in proximity to other clients. If necessary, ask the client to wait outside and to confirm her arrival by contacting the massage therapist by telephone.
- Inform the client that she cannot be accompanied during the appointment, unless required due to a health condition.
- Inform the client about the measures being applied in the workplace.
- Inform the client that she will have to sign a waiver upon arriving.
- Inform the client about the methods of payment available.

## Appointment procedure

### Before the client arrives

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- Practice the proper hand hygiene with warm water and soap or an alcohol-based solution.
- Put on the [personal protective equipment](#) required to perform the massage (the mask should already be on) and (in the following order):
  - the procedure mask (the normal lifespan of a procedure mask is 4 hours)
  - the disposable or washable short-sleeve frock (optional)
  - eye protection (visor or protective goggles)

**Note:** If a protective suit is donned, it should be removed only at the end of a work shift (it is not necessary to change it between clients).

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## When the client arrives

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- Wear the procedure mask when receiving the client.
- Ask the client to wash her hands with warm water and soap or an alcohol-based solution.
- Suggest that the client wear a face covering, whenever possible. If the client wears a face covering upon arriving, he or she can keep it on.  
**Note:** A procedure mask is more effective in blocking particles than a face covering; contrary to the face covering, the procedure mask offers more effective protection to the person wearing it and to others.
- If desired, the massage therapist can provide the client with disposable shoe covers or washable slippers.
- Make sure that the client:
  - Does not present with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever >38°C, recent cough or aggravated chronic cough, difficulty breathing, sudden loss of smell without nasal congestion and with or without loss of taste, muscle pain, headaches, intense fatigue, loss of appetite, sore throat, diarrhea).
  - Has not travelled outside the country in the previous 14 days.
  - Is not waiting for a screening test for COVID-19 or has not tested positive in the previous 14 days.
  - Has not been in contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the previous 14 days.**Note: At all times, the massage therapist must avoid seeing a client who presents symptoms of COVID-19 or meets one of the criteria listed above.**
- Ask the client to leave her personal effects in the place designated for that purpose.
- Direct the client towards the massage room by opening the doors for him or her.

## During the massage

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- At all times during the massage, the massage therapist must avoid touching her face. If she does, she must practice the proper hand hygiene again.
- The client should be strongly advised to keep his or her face covering (or procedure mask) on during the entire massage therapy session. An exception can be made when

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the client is placed in the prone position, head in the head rest, of if the client has difficulty breathing.

- If the client needs to blow her nose or if she touches her face during the massage, the massage therapist can offer her an alcohol-based solution to disinfect her hands. The handkerchief must be disposed of immediately.
- To drink water or blow your nose, remove the mask by taking it from the elastics (avoid touching the filtration surface). When putting the mask back on, handle it only from the elastics and wash your hands immediately following the proper hand hygiene procedure.

## After the massage

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- The massage therapist and the client must practice proper hand hygiene using soap and water or a water/alcohol solution.
- Have the client pay (disinfect the payment terminal after each transaction, if applicable).
- Before leaving, the client must remove his or her slippers or shoe covers (if applicable) and the face covering (if he or she is wearing a face covering provided by the massage therapist).
- Accompany the client to the exit and open the door for him or her.

## Between each client

### Cleaning and disinfection

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- Remove the sheets, covers and other fabric equipment that cannot be disinfected.
- Place soiled fabrics in a sealed plastic or fabric bag before putting the bag outside the massage room for washing.
- Disinfect protective eyewear, if applicable, using a [disinfectant approved by Health Canada](#) and compatible with the manufactured material (following the manufacturer's instructions).
- Using a [disinfectant approved by Health Canada](#), disinfect the surfaces in the massage room and **all surfaces touched by the client**, including (but not limited to) the table or

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massage chair, footstool, the pen used to sign the waiver, and the equipment used during the massage (ex. hot stones, massage oil container, etc.).

- Always start with the surfaces that are less frequently soiled, then proceed to those that are often soiled (5).
- Depending on the disinfectant product used and skin sensitivity, the wearing of gloves could be advised when disinfecting in order to protect your hands.

**Note:** Please refer to the sheet entitled [Procedures for cleaning and disinfecting the care environment and equipment in medical clinics](#) (in French only) for detailed procedures for cleaning and disinfecting examination rooms, waiting rooms, equipment and washroom facilities.

- If the massage room has a window leading outdoors, air out the room for at least 15 minutes between appointments. If there is no window in the massage room, the [INSPQ](#) states that disinfecting surfaces is sufficient.
- The massage therapist can remove the eye protection (and disinfect it using a [disinfectant approved by Health Canada](#) and compatible with the manufacturing material) and the procedure mask (if applicable, given the possible 4-hour use) in compliance with the [safe removal guidelines](#) (dispose of the mask in a contact-free garbage can). In order to limit the spread of infection, the procedure mask must be changed between each client. The protective suit (if applicable) can be removed at the end of the work shift.

**Note :** If you wear the mask for 4 hours over several non-consecutive periods, it is recommended to fold it so that the outside of the mask be folded back on itself, and place it in a paper bag or a container that is not airtight.

- Practice proper hand hygiene after each disinfection.

## Washing fabrics

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- Wash work clothing after every work day, in compliance with the manufacturer's instructions and using the hottest water setting appropriate for these articles, along with the regular detergent.
- Fabrics (ex. sheets, covers, towels, massage therapy work clothes, etc.) must be placed in a fabric or plastic bag and put outside the massage room for washing. In the event that the bag cannot be placed outside the massage room, place it in a bag or garbage can with a cover. The parts of the garbage can that enter into contact with soiled fabric or the massage therapist's hands must be disinfected between each client.

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- Wash fabrics in the machine using normal detergent.
- Use hot water (71°C for at least 10 minutes), unless you are using a cold-water detergent.
- Use a sufficient quantity of detergent based on the volume of clothing washed.
- Thoroughly dry the washed clothing immediately afterwards at a high temperature if possible.
- Practice proper hand hygiene after holding potentially contaminated fabrics.
- If the fabric is soiled with body fluids, the use of bleach is recommended.

## Other recommendations

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- Common rooms, staff rooms and washrooms (including high-touch surfaces and objects) must be disinfected at least twice a day, at the beginning and at the end of the work day, or more often as required (high client traffic, presence of stains, etc.).
- Wearing jewelry and loose-fitting clothing is not advised.
- Keep long hair tied back when giving a massage.
- If several therapists work in the same location, make sure that this protocol is applied consistently on the work premises.
- Keep available a sufficient quantity of the required personal protective equipment in order to ensure the safety of massage therapists and clients.
- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces inside the massage room (ideally at the beginning and at the end of the day, and after each client) in order to limit the spread of infection.

# Massage therapy at the client's home

## Before arrival

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- Contact the client by telephone before arriving in order to ensure that the client and the other people living with the client:
  - Do not present with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever >38°C, recent cough or aggravated chronic cough, difficulty breathing, sudden loss of smell with no nasal congestion and with or without loss of taste, muscle pain, headache, intense fatigue, loss of appetite, sore throat, diarrhea).
  - Have not travelled outside the country in the previous 14 days.
  - Are not waiting for the results of a screening test for COVID-19 or have not tested positive for it in the previous 14 days.
  - Have not been in contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the previous 14 days.

***Note: At all times, the massage therapist must avoid going to the home of a client who presents symptoms of COVID-19 or meets one of the criteria listed above.***

- Make sure to keep in your possession:
  - An alcohol-based solution approved by Health Canada.
  - Disinfectant wipes approved by Health Canada OR the proper disinfectant materials (including a disinfectant product approved by Health Canada, paper towels, etc.).
  - The personal protective equipment required to provide massage therapy services (see Table 1).
  - A copy of the waiver to be signed by the client (optional).

## Upon arrival

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- Keep a minimum distance of two metres from all people living at the client's home (with the exception of the client during the massage).

***Please refer to the previous section to read the protocol to follow before, during and after massages.***

# Massage therapy in businesses

## Before arrival

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- Contact the resource person with the company or organization in order to ensure that the clients receiving massages:
  - Do not present symptoms of COVID-19 (fever >38°C, recent cough or aggravated chronic cough, difficulty breathing, sudden loss of smell with no nasal congestion and with or without loss of taste, muscle pain, headache, intense fatigue, loss of appetite, sore throat, diarrhea).
  - Have not travelled outside the country in the previous 14 days.
  - Are not waiting for the results of a screening test for COVID-19 or have not tested positive for it in the previous 14 days.
  - Have not been in contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the previous 14 days.

***Note: At all times, the massage therapist must avoid going to the home of a client who presents symptoms of COVID-19 or meets one of the criteria listed above.***

- Make sure to keep in your possession:
  - An alcohol-based solution approved by Health Canada.
  - Disinfectant wipes approved by Health Canada OR the proper disinfectant materials (including a disinfectant product approved by Health Canada, paper towels, etc.).
  - The personal protective equipment required to provide massage therapy services (see Table 1).
  - A copy of the waiver to be signed by the client (optional).

## Upon arrival

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- Keep a minimum distance of two metres from employees (with the exception of clients during the massage).

***Please refer to the previous section to read the procedure to follow before, during and after massages.***



# References

- 1) Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail — CNESST (May 2020). [Toolkit for the Therapeutic Care Sector - COVID-19](#).
- 2) Institut national de la santé publique du Québec — INSPQ (May 10, 2020). [Interim Recommendations for Private Practice Therapeutic Care](#).
- 3) Institut national de la santé publique du Québec — INSPQ (April 4, 2020). [Procédure de nettoyage et de désinfection de l'environnement et des équipements pour les cliniques médicales](#). (in French only)
- 4) Health Canada – [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\): List of disinfectants with evidence for use against COVID-19](#)
- 5) Entretien, hygiène et salubrité des objets, des surfaces et des locaux — Ministère de la santé des services sociaux (in French only).  
<https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/guide-garderie/chap4-entretien-hygiene.pdf>

Similar information from the INSPQ regarding surface cleaning :

<https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/covid-19/environnement/surface-cleaning>

## Added links to useful information

### People at risk

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- [Recommendations for workers who are pregnant or breastfeeding](#)
- [Recommendations for workers who are immunosuppressed](#)
- [Recommendations for workers with severe chronic diseases](#)

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## Work environment

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- [Questions – answers concerning COVID-and indoor environments](#)
- [Recommendations concerning the use of elevators in work environments](#)
- [Procedures for cleaning and disinfecting the care environment and equipment in medical clinics](#)
- [Measures for handling money in stores and work environments](#)
- [Recommendations concerning portable air conditioning and ventilation in work environments](#)

## Guidelines for symptoms and cases of COVID-19

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- [MSSS guidelines for contact with confirmed cases of COVID-19](#)
- [MSSS guidelines for people presenting with symptoms of COVID-19](#)
- [MSSS guidelines for people with COVID-19 in isolation at home](#)
- [MSSS guidelines for a person presenting with symptoms and waiting to be tested for COVID-19](#)