



Talking to Patients About Your Mask Policy

As of June 11, 2022, RMTs and their patients will no longer be required to wear masks during massage therapy treatments. However, many RMTs and patients will continue to choose to continue to wear masks. RMTs can continue to ask that patients wear a mask in their practice and a patient may also ask an RMT to wear a mask for the duration of their treatment.

This document intends to help RMTs work through some of the situations that may arise as mask mandates are lifted in health care settings.

Your mask policy

RMTs have every right to continue to have a policy in their business requiring their patients to wear masks. There are three basic options for a mask policy in your practice:

- You and your patients will continue to wear masks
- You will continue to wear a mask, but make masking optional for patients
- You will not continue to wear a mask, unless it is requested by the patient

Whether you will continue to require masks in your practice or not, there are certain things you should do to ensure that you and your patients are comfortable and safe.

- Let patients know your policy right away on your website, in appointment confirmation emails, in physical practice spaces, social media channels and any other communications channels you have.
- Communicate your policy professionally, calmly and respectfully.
- Keep patient-centred care in mind.
- Continue to conduct the risk assessments you have been conducting throughout the pandemic in your practice. You should continue to determine that the benefits of massage therapy treatment outweigh the risk of COVID-19. This assessment can take into account your vaccination status and the vaccination status of your patients, as well as whether you or your patients are at increased risk of severe COVID-19 due to a variety of personal risk factors.

Below are some tips and information to help you when discussing your mask policy with your patients.

You would like patients to continue wearing masks

If you want to continue wearing a mask while practicing, you can continue to do so. You can also ask that patients continue to wear a mask in your treatment room, making it a policy in your business. You may be unsure of how to approach conversations about that type of policy. Here are some tips:

- **Communicate.** As explained above, all RMTs should communicate their policy in advance, and when you do this, you can state you are still requiring that patients wear a mask in your practice in order to protect your health and the health of your patients. Keep the message clear and simple.
- **Assess the risk.** You can use your assessment of whether the benefits of massage therapy treatment outweigh the risks of COVID-19 to explain your masking policy.
- **Have masks available.** Consider having masks available in your practice for patients if they come without one if you haven't done this already. Since many locations no longer require masks, it may become more likely that patients simply don't have a mask on them but will wear one if provided.
- **Adopt your practice.** If a patient does not want to wear a mask after you have requested it and discussed why the mask is recommended, and you have assessed that the risk outweighs the benefits, consider adaptations to your practice and provide alternatives if possible. For example, you can use additional personal protective equipment (PPE) and treat those patients at the end of the day to mitigate some of the risk. If a compromise cannot be found that allows both the RMT and the patient to be comfortable, you can let the patient know you cannot provide treatment at this time if they cannot wear a mask, documenting this conversation in the patient's health record and arranging alternate treatment with an RMT who can provide them treatment.
- **Be professional.** This can be an emotional issue for many patients, and some may get heated about the fact that they don't want to wear masks. However, it can help if you keep a calm tone, speak slowly and clearly, and keep the tone of your voice normal. You should attempt to keep a professional yet relaxed posture. You should acknowledge that you understand that the patient might be upset and that this can be a charged situation, but this is the policy you have chosen to implement in your practice. You can then reassure them that if they still will not wear a mask you can help them find an RMT who will be able to treat them.
- **Be confident.** Stay confident when communicating with patients. You have the right to choose to require that your patients wear masks during their massage therapy care, and you can be confident in that fact.
- **Be considerate.** Be empathetic to patients' questions and concerns while still sticking to your masking policy. For example, if a patient has previously felt uncomfortable with wearing a mask and was looking forward to no longer wearing it and feels that they should no longer have to wear one anywhere, you can acknowledge that you understand that masks can be uncomfortable and that since mask mandates have ended, they won't have to wear masks most places. After acknowledging this, you can reiterate that as a health professional you are able to

make your own masking rules for your practice, and you can help them find an RMT who will be able to accommodate them.

- **Don't take abuse.** Remember that you don't need to take any abuse and do not need to treat a patient who is abusive for any reason. The CMTO Client-Centre Care Standard states that an RMT can discontinue care if "the client is abusive or is a real or perceived threat to the RMT and the RMT has made all reasonable attempts to arrange alternative services." If you feel that you could arrange alternate services with another RMT for this patient, then you should attempt to arrange this, but the Standards of Practice allow you to discharge a patient who is abusive.

You will continue to wear a mask, but will make masking optional for patients

Even if you do not want to continue to require patients to wear masks, you can choose to wear a mask when you're treating. If you will continue wearing a mask but will not require it from patients, some patients may ask you why you're continuing to wear a mask. Below are some tips you can use to inform your response if this question comes up:

- Keep your response simple and straightforward and convey the information as calmly and professionally as possible. You can let patients know that based on personal factors and your evaluation of the risk to yourself and your patients, you have chosen to continue to wear a mask and they can choose what makes them the most comfortable.
- You can reiterate your official policy and let the patient know that they may see RMTs having different policies and making different choices regarding masks. You can let them know that both RMTs and patients are able to make their own choices regarding masks based on their comfort, preference, and assessment of the risk.
- If patients comment on the fact that some of your other patients are wearing masks and some are not, you can let them know that masks are no longer required in health care settings, but due to the close contact inherent in massage therapy you have chosen to continue to wear a mask to protect yourself and your patients. You can add that all your patients have different levels of risk of COVID-19 and are welcome to conduct their own assessment about the risks they're willing to tolerate. You can let them know you will continue doing your own assessments to determine whether the benefits of massage therapy outweigh the risks of potential COVID-19 exposure.

Patients ask you to continue wearing a mask

- If you will not be wearing a mask to practice and/or will not be requiring patients to wear a mask in your practice, you should inform your patients of this in advance of the treatment, as with any policy, so your patients know what to expect.
- If you will not be wearing a mask during treatment, some patients will ask that you wear a mask during their treatment.
- The CMTO Standard of Practice: Client-Centred Care states "The Registered Massage Therapist (RMT/MT) provides Massage Therapy that is focused on the best interests and unique needs,

views, preferences and concerns of each individual client ensuring the client is actively involved in decision-making regarding their care.” It also states that the RMT needs to ensure clients’ comfort and safety during the treatment.

- If an RMT’s patient feels more comfortable with their RMT wearing a mask during treatment, then the RMT should keep patient-centred care in mind and wear a mask for that treatment. Based on the Client-Centred Care Standard, you should also not comment on any patient’s choice to continue to wear a mask and encourage them to do whatever they feel the most comfortable with.

Regardless of Your Choice

Whether you choose to wear a mask and/or choose to require your patients to wear masks during treatment, there are certain things all RMTs should consider as mask mandates are lifted. Firstly, you should communicate your plans with your patients as soon as you can and be as clear as possible, so your patients know what to expect. You should also keep patient-centred care in mind and attempt to make your patients feel as comfortable and safe as possible. This does not mean you have to change your policy or treat any patients without a mask if you’ve judged that the risks outweigh the benefit. You should continue using your best judgement in all situations, communicate clearly, calmly and professionally, and referring patients elsewhere if you are unable to accommodate them. Any change in mandates can be a confusing time for anyone and hopefully this helps you guide your patients through this as smoothly as possible.