



Virtual Care/ Telehealth/ Telerehabilitation

Virtual care is any care provided remotely. This includes rehabilitation services that use any form of technology (including, but not restricted to, video conferencing, internet and telephone) as an alternative to face-to-face interventions. It may also be referred to as Telehealth or Telerehabilitation.

It is expected that, when delivering these services, physiotherapists comply with all regulatory requirements and deliver the same safe and effective care as in-person treatment.

It is expected that physiotherapists within the province keep up-to-date with statements from the Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists (NSCP) and changes to the Health Protection Act. In the current state of emergency, these can change daily. See <https://nsphysio.com/about-us/news/covid-19> for more information.

The following is a consolidation of information from multiple sites (sources cited) for your ease of use. All resources are listed at the bottom of this document. Any virtual care/ telehealth/ telerehabilitation performed must comply with college (NSCP) and national regulator (Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators) guidelines.

NSCP Standards and Guidelines: <https://nsphysio.com/for-members/standards-and-guidelines/practice-guidelines>



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Regulatory Expectations

Updated information from NSCP concerning Virtual Care/Telehealth/ Telerehabilitation:

(from <https://nsphysio.com/about-us/news/2-uncategorised/544-physiotherapy-services-during-covid-19>)

“When providing virtual care, you must first ensure that it is appropriate and does not expose the patient to greater risk than other possible service delivery methods. We have adapted the process for use during the COVID-19 pandemic as found below. If you are crossing provincial borders you need to check with the other jurisdiction for their processes associated with this.

NS College of Physiotherapists (NSCP) expects the physiotherapist to:

- consider and mitigate the risks to the privacy of the patient’s health information or patient safety depending on the physical environment and context in which services are provided.
- comply with the expectations defined in the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethical Conduct.
- ensure that interventions, referrals, or consultations delivered using virtual care technologies are held to the same standards and expectations as those delivered in person.
- use their professional judgment to determine if virtual care is appropriate, taking into consideration:
 - whether virtual care is the most appropriate available method to deliver services.
 - whether a direct physical examination is required to complete the assessment and determine a physiotherapy diagnosis and treatment plan.
 - the ability to deliver substantively similar quality care as physiotherapy delivered face-to-face.
 - if patient factors such as physical, sensory, or cognitive deficits may impact the ability to deliver appropriate care via virtual care.
 - informs the patient of the process to follow if they have a concern or complaint about their physiotherapy care.
 - obtains informed consent as appropriate for virtual care



Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association Telehealth Resource

Before the consultation, NSCP recommends contacting the patient and offering them relevant information, such as:

- the tool that will be used for the session: i.e. telephone, videoconference or another platform
- the need for someone to be present for safety or assistance if appropriate
- the duration of the meeting
- privacy protection, consent and anticipated resources needed.
- the cost of the visit and proposed payment options

Following the consultation

- The Physiotherapist must take care to document the interactions as they would if it was a face to face visit.
- The fees for the services rendered can be collected at the end of the consultation.”

What are some considerations when implementing Telehealth?

Stop and ask yourself these questions prior to implementing tele-rehabilitation services (Checklist from the Canadian Physiotherapy Association’s website):

1. Is tele-rehabilitation appropriate for this client?
2. Do I have the skills and training to provide remote physiotherapy to my clients?
3. Am I providing evidence-based informed remotely delivered physiotherapy services?
4. Does this client have the required technology to support remote delivery?
5. Does this client need technical support or in-home support to facilitate your session?
6. What is your “big picture” goal for this remote session: consultation? Education? Assessment? Treatment?
7. Which platform will allow you to provide the same quality care as face-to-face?
8. Is the setting on the client’s end a safe, secure, and confidential environment?
9. Is my environment appropriate for this delivery model (high speed internet, confidential setting, consent, and PIPEDA compliant platform, etc.)?
10. Am I following all of the required guidelines from my college? (*see additional information from the NS college below*)

Other considerations (from the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario website):

“You must decide if tele-rehabilitation is the most appropriate and available way to deliver care.

- Is an in-person, hands on examination needed to complete the assessment and determine a clinical analysis, treatment goals and plan?
- Will the patient be safe under the care of the physiotherapist within the context of their home or work environment?



Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association Telehealth Resource

- Are there physical, cognitive or sensory deficits that may make the delivery of physiotherapy care unsafe or ineffective?
- Can someone be available to assist the patient if needed at their location?
- How will you protect the safety of your patient's personal health information?
- Are you competent in the use of the technology, its capabilities and its limitations?"

It is important to know that when providing telerehabilitation across provincial borders, the physiotherapist must hold an appropriate certificate to practice in the jurisdiction from which he or she provides the care and the jurisdiction in which the care is received. As well, the therapist must comply with each province's privacy rules (*refer to Privacy Considerations below*).

Additionally, you should have a plan in place to deal with potential adverse events such as patient medical emergencies, failure of the communication technology or environmental hazards (*refer to Safety Considerations below*).

And, don't forget about consent! You must have a discussion with the patient and provide all the information they would need to make an informed decision about their care (*refer to Informed Consent below*).

More information for physiotherapists can be found on CAPR's publications page:
<https://www.alliancept.org/publications/>



Consent

Consent is a major topic of concern for Telehealth; it differs from the consent process followed during a face-to-face treatment.

Consent Issues (from the CAPR's Tele-rehabilitation in Physiotherapy Guidelines for Physiotherapists, also on NSCP's website):

1. In delivering tele-rehabilitation services, the physiotherapist must verify the identity of the client, the provider and any support personnel involved. Document the verification policy and processes used.
2. The physiotherapist should augment routine informed consent processes as required to support tele-rehabilitation or cross-border care delivery.
 - a. Patients should be made aware of any limitations that tele-rehabilitation service present as compared to an in-person encounter for that patient's situation, such as the inability to perform hands-on examination, assessment and treatment.
 - b. Consent should be obtained for videotaping, recording or storing information and data from the tele-rehabilitation session; for the transmission of information via tele-rehabilitation technologies, and for the participation of other health care providers or the patient's family in the provision of care.

CAPR has a publications page that includes information for Physiotherapists as well as Patient information sheets that can be helpful when creating consent documentation
<https://www.alliancept.org/publications/>

The CPA released an informed consent document for reference
https://physiotherapy.ca/sites/default/files/covid-19_telehealth_consent_form_cpa_0.pdf



Privacy/Security Considerations

The CPA released a statement that there will be increased cybersecurity risks during this time. See more here: https://physiotherapy.ca/sites/default/files/covid-19_raises_cybersecurity_risks.pdf

Privacy Requirements (from the CAPR's Tele-rehabilitation in Physiotherapy Guidelines for Physiotherapists, also on NSCP's website):

1. The physiotherapist must ensure compliance with all privacy and security requirements both during tele-rehabilitation sessions and when in contact with the patient through other electronic means, such as arranging appointments via email. Document privacy and security measures. Consider topics such as authentication and encryption technology, secure transmission systems and storage mechanisms.
2. Written policies and procedures should be maintained at the same standard as in-person encounters for documentation, maintenance, and transmission of the records of the encounter using tele-rehabilitation technologies.
3. The physiotherapist should ensure that there are guidelines in place to ensure that patient records cannot be accessed by unauthorized users, tampered with or destroyed and are protected at both the originating and remote sites.
4. The physiotherapist must take the necessary action to ensure the security of all devices used in tele-rehabilitation and when storing information related to tele-rehabilitation services.
5. The physiotherapist must be aware of any employer policies for privacy and security for the use of tele-rehabilitation as a treatment modality.

Questions to ask video-conferencing service providers

- Does the service provider or software company retain records (i.e. audio, video) of the patient encounter?
- What type of information are they collecting?
- Who has access to the information, for what purposes, and under what circumstances?
- How is that information protected?

If a third-party service provider is retaining records of the patient encounter such as audio or video files, the physiotherapist must know where that data is stored. The physiotherapist must also disclose to the patient where their data is stored. The physiotherapist may wish to include a statement in their business privacy statement or similar document providing this information and directing the patient to the appropriate staff member if they have questions.



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Ensure that patients understand that this method of communication is not secure in the same way as a private appointment in an exam room.

Instruct them to use a private computer/device (i.e., not an employer's or third party's computer/device) and a secure internet connection. For example, using a personal computer or tablet is more secure than using someone else's computer, and your access to the Internet on your home network will generally be more secure than an open guest Wi-Fi connection.

Safety Considerations

Safety Considerations (from the CAPR's Tele-rehabilitation in Physiotherapy Guidelines for Physiotherapists, also on NSCP's website):

1. The physiotherapist must have a safety protocol in place in the event of an emergency or adverse event.
2. There must be an alternative method of contacting the patient, and the patient should be provided with an alternate way of contacting the physiotherapist. For example, in the case of internet failure, the physiotherapist must be able to telephone the patient.
3. The physiotherapist must ensure access to appropriate technical support for trouble shooting in the event of difficulty with the technology. It is also recommended that all technologies are trialed prior to patient appointments to ensure good functioning of the system.

Make sure to collect all emergency contact at the beginning of each appointment in case of any adverse events.



Platforms that offer telehealth services

Please ensure that whatever platform you use is compliant with the Personal Health Information Act (PHIA), as required by the province of Nova Scotia. (refer to https://novascotia.ca/just/regulations/regs/hipershealth.htm#TOC2_4)

Partner offers with CPA:

Physiotec
Clinicmaster
Embodia Academy
Physitrack
PHZIO
Mediseen
Jane App

Visit <https://physiotherapy.ca/tele-health-partners-offers> for more information on offers.



Nova Scotia Physiotherapy Association Telehealth Resource **Resources**

Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators

Considerations for Telepractice in Physical Therapy in Canada

https://nsphysio.com/images/NSCPGuidelines/TelepracticeGuideFINALAllianceSept 2006.pdf?utm_source=CPA+Membership+-+Nova+Scotia&utm_campaign=2ba0bbae34-EMAIL CAMPAIGN 2020 03 20 04 55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_bac8e3aa9b-2ba0bbae34-144334573

CAPR's Publications Page

<https://www.alliancept.org/publications/>

Nova Scotia College of Physiotherapists

Standards and Guidelines

<https://nsphysio.com/for-members/standards-and-guidelines/practice-guidelines>

NSCP COVID-19 Updates

<https://nsphysio.com/covid-19-information>

Canadian Physiotherapy Association

<https://physiotherapy.ca/tele-rehabilitation>

Other College websites:

College of Physiotherapists of Ontario

<https://www.collegept.org/blog/post/college-blog/2019/01/23/tele-rehabilitation-another-tool-in-your-toolkit>

Physiotherapy Alberta College & Association

<https://www.physiotherapyalberta.ca/physiotherapists/resources-to-help-you-meet-practice-standards/telerehabilitation-guide>

Physiotherapy Association of British Columbia

<https://bcphysio.org/news-publications/pabc-news/physiotherapy-and-covid-19-telerehabilitation-resources>