

Guidelines on Providing In-Person and Group Services during COVID-19 Recovery

As the Government of New Brunswick moves into recovery for COVID-19, it is critical that public health measures are followed to reduce the risk impact of further waves of COVID-19 to the public and to progress towards a 'new normal'. In-person service and group sessions will look different compared to past practice in ways of delivering care, conducting business and attending to the physical environment.

Follow the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) webpage for [Health and Allied Professionals](#). Updated general information is also being provided on the [Coronavirus Disease webpage](#). In addition, the Public Health Agency of Canada provides information on their website: [What Health Professionals Need to Know](#).

Dietitians employed by hospitals, health authorities and publicly funded long-term care facilities should refer to guidance provided by their employers.

The direction in this document pertains to the delivery of care outside these settings. These include but are not limited to private practice clinics and community-based practices.

COVID-19 Operational Plan

In March 2020, the Province of New Brunswick declared a State of Emergency, requiring all workplaces develop a COVID-19 Operational Plan to reduce the risk of transmission. At 11:59 pm on Friday, July 30, 2021, New Brunswick will be going to the **Green Level (Mandatory Order lifted)** and the **COVID-19 Operational Plan will no longer be required. However, NBAD encourages dietitians to maintain their current operational plan protocols.**

Should the Province of New Brunswick reinstate the Mandatory Order, each business, including dietitians with a private practice, **will be required to have a [COVID-19 Operational Plan](#)** outlining how daily operations will meet requirements (e.g., physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting, hand and respiratory hygiene, pre-screening for symptoms). If you are a NBAD member working for an employer, the operational plan should be developed by your employer.

This plan must follow the recommendations and requirements of Public Health and WorkSafeNB. Individual operational plans will not be reviewed or approved by Public Health, WorkSafeNB or NBAD; however, the business may be asked to share their plan upon request of the proper

authorities. This may occur during an unannounced visit or a pre-scheduled visit by a Public Health Inspector, WorkSafeNB, or Department of Public Safety. Should a complaint be made to NBAD, operational plans may be requested if part of the investigation.

The purpose of this guideline is to ensure dietitians have a framework to help mitigate risks in the return to work setting and have considered and included the following in their COVID-19 Operational Plan.

Virtual Care

Consider continuing virtual care when services can be safely and effectively provided virtually. Some services require in-person visits and should only proceed when the anticipated benefits of such services outweigh the risks to the patient/client and the dietitian. Consult the following documents on virtual practice guidelines: [Virtual and Electronic Communications During the Pandemic](#) and [Cross Border Dietetic Practice Position Statement](#).

When a Mandatory Order and public health measures are in place, you may be required to limit initial patient/client bookings and prioritize by urgency. The dietitian is accountable for prioritizing access to in-person services based on clinical judgment and with consideration given to the patient/client perspective and the referral source. When determining priority for in-person care, dietitians should reflect upon the following considerations:

- Acuity of the patient's/client's condition;
- Functional impairment or impact of the condition on health/related quality of life;
- Impact of not receiving services;
- Appropriateness of service provision via virtual care;
- Necessity of services which can only be provided in-person;
- Duration of patient/client wait times for care.

Patient and Client Considerations

- Pre-screen patients/clients before scheduling appointments and upon arrival for appointments for any relevant symptoms and travel history. Use the current screening tool for COVID-19 available on the [government website](#). Note: Dietitians may determine if appointments for patients/clients should be deferred, cancelled or provided virtually correspondingly to the screening tool's results.
- Reconsider and communicate appointment rescheduling and cancelling policies until such time as risk is substantially lowered (e.g., waiving cancellation fees).

- Make sure your patients/clients understand and consent to your operational plan before attending a in-person or group session.

Social Distancing and Personal Protective Equipment

- During the province's Green Level (Mandatory Order lifted), dietitians are encouraged to maintain physical distancing between themselves and the patient/client during an in-person or group session. Dietitians who have direct contact with or are unable to maintain a safe physical distance of at least two meters from patients/clients are encouraged to use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- During the province's Green Level (Mandatory Order lifted), dietitians are encouraged to reconfigure offices and waiting areas to ensure physical distancing is maintained (1) among patients/clients, (2) between patients/clients and staff when not engaged in direct patient care, and (3) among staff. Seating in waiting areas should be spaced to maintain a minimum physical distance of two metres. Should the waiting areas be too small to accommodate social distancing, consider alternative solutions to waiting in the office, such as asking people to wait in vehicles and text messaging or calling when appointments are ready.
- During the province's Green Level (Mandatory Order lifted), dietitians may choose to maintain a policy for patients/clients who enter their premises to continue to wear a mask. Dietitians should respectfully offer alternative ways to access the services in cases where some individuals are unable to wear a mask.
- Should the Mandatory Order be reinstated, dietitians must respect the public health measures related to social distancing and PPE.

Workplace Environments and Hygiene Practices

- Invite patients/clients and others to wash their hands or to utilize a hand sanitizing station when coming into and exiting the office.
- Practice effective hand hygiene after each patient/client – washing your hands with soap and water or a minimum 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Ensure high-touch surfaces such as clinic equipment, visual nutrition teaching aids, desks, tables and chairs are cleaned with a disinfectant between patient/client appointments or group sessions.
- Use electronic payment devices when possible. Disinfect pin pads used to process payments between each patient/use. If you must handle money, always ensure regular handwashing and have minimum 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer readily available. Do



- not touch your face after handling money. Ensure that hand hygiene supplies are available for both the patient/client and staff at the point of purchase.
- Post signage on proper hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing throughout your workplace. How this is applied will vary depending on your workplace and operational plan, but signage is strongly encouraged and may be a requirement during a Mandatory Order. At a minimum, signage should be placed at all common entrances and in the waiting area. For public health signage, see the [“Posters and Awareness Resources”](#) section.
 - Ensure education room capacity for group sessions respects the public health measures in place.
 - Placement of visual cues for directional flow through the facility are encouraged and may be a requirement during a Mandatory Order.
 - Clean and disinfect twice daily or more often as required all common areas and other high-touched surfaces and objects as the COVID-19 virus can survive for several days on different surfaces and objects. Examples include door knobs, light switches, phones, touch screens/mobile devices, keyboards, counter tops, hand rails and washrooms. For more information, consult the [Cleaning and Disinfection for COVID-19](#).
 - Remove non-essential items from the client waiting areas, including magazines, toys and remote controls.
 - Sharing of education material between clients/patients in a group session should be limited. If material is shared, hand hygiene is encouraged beforehand.
 - Establish clear responsibilities and accountabilities for staff involved in cleaning and disinfecting activities. Allocate PPE (gloves and masks) for use during cleaning and disinfecting activities, according to product specifications, to protect workers engaging in these activities.

Food Preparation and Sampling Measures

- Practice effective hand hygiene in the food work environment. Handwashing is a greater protective barrier to infection than wearing disposable gloves.
- Consider providing hand sanitizer to clients prior to sampling foods.
- Encourage clients to return to their seats before sampling (as they will be taking off their masks, if applicable).
- Limit contact with items and other clients by utilizing strategies such as:
 - serving samples directly to each client (avoid self-serve stations and sample trays)
 - using disposable plates and cups
 - using individually wrapped stir sticks, straws, utensils, etc.



- using one-time use or single serve containers for milkers/creamers, sugar, condiments, etc.
- Should samples be self-served, have them pre-portioned and individually wrapped.

Group Sessions Conducted in the Community

While virtual group sessions are encouraged, some community settings may not be equipped to hold a virtual event. Dietitians are encouraged to wear a mask while entering the facility. Once inside the building, if the dietitian can maintain physical distancing of two metres, the mask can be removed.

For the personal protection of the dietitian, they should ask the event organizer the COVID-19 measures where the event will be held (screening procedure among participants, social distancing, personal protective equipment, etc.). If the dietitian does not feel safe in the environment, they should not pursue the group session.

Personal Guidance

- Follow guidance from the OCMOH on actions you can take to stay healthy and protect the people around you (handwashing, coughing/sneezing etiquette, etc.). For more information, see the [OCMOH webpage](#).
- If you are exhibiting signs of COVID-19, you must not provide in-person care and should not be in attendance at clinics or other practice settings where other staff and patients/clients are present. Dietitians may be required to provide patient/client information for contact tracing and this should be disclosed when obtaining consent or providing notice otherwise to patients.

Additional Resources:

- [OCMOH Resources webpage](#)
- [NB's Recovery Plan](#)
- [Government of New Brunswick COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses](#)
- [WorkSafeNB](#)



References:

1. GOVERNMENT OF NEW BRUNSWICK (Spring 2020). *Public health measures for businesses, educational institutions, organizations and service providers.*
2. GOVERNMENT OF NEW BRUNSWICK (Spring 2020). *Guidance Document of General Public Health Measures During COVID-19 Recovery.*
3. COLLEGE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS OF NEW BRUNSWICK (May 2020). *COVID-19: Guidelines on Operational Plan Development.*
4. BRITISH COLUMBIA HEALTH REGULATORS (May 2020). *Guidance for Regulated Health Professionals – Providing In-Person Community Care During COVID-19.*
5. GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN (Spring 2020). *Medical Professionals Guideline, Saskatchewan COVID-19 Re-Open Plan.*
6. GOVERNMENT OF NEW BRUNSWICK. *NB's Recovery Plan.* Retrieved from <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/covid-19/recovery.html> on July 27, 2020.
7. RESTAURANTS CANADA (May 7, 2020). *COVID-19 Rapid Recovery Guide, Reopening Resource for Foodservice Operators.*
8. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (April 7, 2020). *COVID-19 and food safety: guidance for food businesses.*
9. WORKSAFE NB. *Green and beyond: Communicable disease prevention.* Retrieved from <https://www.worksafenb.ca/safety-topics/green-and-beyond-communicable-disease-prevention/> on July 30, 2021.
10. GOVERNMENT OF NEW BRUNSWICK. *Living with COVID-19, Protective Health Measures.* Retrieved from <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/covid-19/guide-living-with-covid-19.pdf> on July 30, 2021.