

# School-Based and Early Intervention Occupational Therapy Services—Decision Guide for COVID-19

**In the rapidly changing health care and education landscape, the ability to evaluate, plan, and adapt is vital; occupational therapy practitioners have unique skills to address this challenge.**

- The following checklist can assist in the development of an agency-specific and school-based algorithm and work plan during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Occupational therapy practitioners and directors should work closely with leadership to develop a plan and maintain continuous monitoring to address emerging factors and guidelines.

Pediatric occupational therapy services occur in a variety of settings via various practice provisions. Practitioners in school-based and early intervention settings must consider the following.

## Staffing Considerations:

- Any necessary updates, temporary changes, or revisions to individualized education plans (IEPs) or individualized family service plans (IFSPs)
  - Examples of major changes: Adding a new intervention, significant alterations to the amount of weekly/monthly time for service provisions, adding or eliminating services, etc.
  - Examples of minor changes: Moving from a group intervention to a 1:1 or vice versa, moving intervention to virtual or back to in-person classroom, etc.
- Additional considerations:
  - Does the change to the IEP/IFSP require an in-person meeting?
  - Does the change simply need an email between parents and administrators?
  - The [Department of Education fact sheet](#) has additional details for school-based services
- Alternate service provisions and settings
  - Parental support in home-based services versus the school setting for children requiring more hands-on assistance
  - Facility setting versus home setting to ensure safety provisions when the home setting presents challenges or potential risks, such as threat of infection
  - Facility setting secondary to lack of supplies or access to supplies left at a school remaining closed
- Consider/continue alternatives to service provisions such as telehealth whenever possible
- Review the following AOTA resources:
  - [AOTA's Telehealth Resource Page](#)
  - [AOTA's Telehealth Decision Guide](#)
  - [AOTA's Home Health Decision Guide](#)

- Ethical Considerations
  - AOTA's [Code of Ethics](#)
  - [The American Occupational Therapy Association Advisory Opinion for the Ethics Commission](#)
- Agency policies and procedures relating to provision of occupational therapy
- Clinical decision making and professional reasoning
- [State, local, and agency guidelines and policies during COVID19 public health emergency](#)
- [OT and Telehealth state statutes, regulations, and board statements](#)

### Considerations for In-Person Services

The following was retrieved from <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6883734-CDC-Business-Plans.html>

- Adhere to safety precautions for proceeding with services
  - Promote and teach healthy hygiene practices
  - Have necessary hygiene supplies, such as soap and hand sanitizer, readily available
  - Have cleaning and disinfecting supplies available to use between service provisions (ensure safety by keeping out of children's' reach)
  - Utilize external cues such as signage to reinforce hygiene practices
- Standardize use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and infection control procedures, as indicated in the guidelines for IDEA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and infection control department
  - Utilize the OSHA standards, strategies to optimize the supply of PPE, and control and prevention guidance
  - Utilize face coverings (including cloth coverings in the absence of PPE) when social distances are not possible
  - Teach the proper use of PPE and wearing cloth face coverings to staff, children, and family members
  - Implement a staff competency measure for correctly donning/doffing PPE
- Adopt health screening procedures for children and adults
- Identify procedures for individuals who display signs of illness, and the plans for future service provisions (e.g., clearance by a health care provider).
  - Designating a separate area for someone showing signs of illness, and the cleaning procedures to follow (e.g., disinfecting and closing area for at least 24 hours following exposure)
  - Having procedures for removing and cleaning supplies utilized by an individual showing signs of illness (e.g., personal items used during home care sessions)
- Establish self-reporting procedures in the case of illness of staff, children, or caregivers
- Ensure proper ventilation as appropriate, prioritizing safety (e.g., facility maintenance of ventilation systems, opening windows unless doing so poses a risk to the child)
- Minimize the number of individuals present (e.g., don't allow visitors, additional staff/family members, or other children not receiving services)
  - Stagger session times to avoid overlap with other scheduled sessions/appointments and allow time to employ infection control procedures between sessions
  - Schedule home care sessions to allow additional time for infection control procedures between families
- Keep the child's personal items and supplies separate by removing or storing them in a plastic bag away from treatment supplies
- Avoid immediate contact where possible. For examples:
  - Perform social distancing during tabletop activities by placing seats 6 feet apart and avoiding face-to-face sitting positions

- Use visual aids where appropriate versus physical contact
- Ask family members to assist with feeding/oral motor interventions while the therapist provides guidance and implements social distancing

## Assessment and Evaluation

- Prioritize safety and precautions for infection control and social distancing, and alternative models such as telehealth
  - Review tool psychometrics to determine if telehealth or caregiver coaching/completion are valid and reliable methods to complete the assessment tool
- Develop methods for collecting data, analyzing, and sharing results to meet guidelines for the IEP or IFSP.
- Develop procedures to collect and analyze data and share with family and team members

## Group Service Provisions

- Prioritize safety and precautions for infection control, use of cloth face coverings, and social distancing
- Consider necessary updates or revisions to IEPs, IFSPs, or outpatient treatment plans to support group therapy interventions
- Consider alternative delivery models, such as telehealth
  - Review [AOTA's Telehealth Resource Page](#)
- Confirm approval to bill for group services
- Address [guidelines for sharing and reporting student information under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)
- Develop group treatment guidelines and expectations such as [WE SMILE: Creating a Pediatric Group Therapy Framework](#)

## Specific Considerations for School-Based Services

- Review the policies for providing school-based services by the U.S. Department of Education and local educational agencies. The IDEA webpage provides a [Supplemental Fact Sheet](#)
- Review the latest information compiled by AOTA to address the [provision of school-based services](#) during COVID-19
- Address [guidelines for sharing and reporting student information under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)
- Consider the provision of telehealth by reviewing [AOTA's Telehealth Resources page](#)

## Specific Considerations for Early Intervention Services

- Review the policies for provision by your local and state agencies
- Consider temporary services at hospitals and medical clinics as discussed in the [IDEA Questions and Answers on Providing Services to Children with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak \(March 2020\)](#)
- Review the latest information compiled by AOTA to address the [provision of pediatric early intervention services during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)

## Pediatric CE Resources:

- [Reinventing the Wheel: Behavioral Health Care During COVID-19 \(webinar\)](#)
- [Webcast: Fundamentals of Pediatric Home Modifications \(webinar\)](#)
- [Assessment in Pediatric Telehealth](#)
- [Now and Later: Addressing the Immediate and Future OT Needs of Adolescents & Young Adults \(webinar\)](#)