

COVID-19 Transitioning – Obligatory Conditions and Guidelines for Chinese Medicine/Acupuncture Clinics

The following obligatory conditions are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta and require strict adherence. Failure to adhere to these conditions will result in enforcement procedures as provided by the Act.

As COVID-19 restrictions are gradually relaxed, employers and workers must work together to adapt and promote safe work practices consistent with advice from public health authorities and to ensure that premises are ready for the social distancing and correct hygiene measures that are critical to the success of the transition.

Employers and workers must prevent the transmission of COVID-19 while at work, consistent with updated advice from the public health authorities.

Employers and workers must prepare for the possibility that there will be cases of COVID-19 in the workplace and be ready to respond immediately, appropriately, effectively and efficiently, and consistent with specific recommendations from public health authorities.

Mandatory conditions to be observed by Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture clinics

- Ensure that maximum capacity of clients inside the facility at any one time is one person per 4 square metres, including staff.
- Acrylic or tempered glass barriers should be fitted in reception areas (2 metres from the floor).
- Couches/ chairs must be kept at a minimum distance of 2 metres from each other or separated by an acrylic or tempered glass barrier which is 2 metres high. These barriers must be cleaned properly after every client (see section studio environment).
- Hand sanitizers must be made available at the reception area and near all work areas for employee and client use (sanitizers with sensors are recommended).
- Clients (and suppliers) must wear a mask (covering mouth, nose and chin) or visor at all times unless instructed otherwise by the service provider due to the process being undertaken.
- All equipment and surfaces used should be disinfected after every client.
- Staff should wear a surgical or cotton mask or visor when providing a service to a client
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Understanding how COVID-19 spreads & the implication to acupuncture Industry.

Current research however suggests that the SARSCoV-2 virus (the virus that causes COVID-19) is transmitted from person to person:

- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks loudly.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 2 metres).

There is also a possibility that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the COVID-19 virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, and eyes.

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some people develop more serious complications and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness increases with age, for people with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease.

Clinic administration

Acupuncture is a legally regulated health care profession regulated by the Health Care Profession Act (210). Licence to practise is granted for persons registered by the Council for Professions Complementary to medicine (210) and who fulfil conditions of qualifications and minimum 2 years of practise (subsidiary legislation 464.16 licence to practise regulations)(211).

Clinic owners /Management should

- Exercise the right of refusal of entry into the clinic of clients if they are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms including coughing, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat.
- Ensure that maximum capacity of clients inside the studio at any one time is one person per 4 square metres, including staff. To achieve this 4 square metre 'rule':
 - calculate the area of the studio (e.g. length of studio in metres x width of studio in metres = area of studio in square metres),
 - divide the area of the studio by 4, and
 - the answer of that division (ignoring any remainder) is the maximum capacity that the studio can hold at any one time.
 - By way of example, if a studio is 25 square metres in size, $25 \div 4 = 6.25$, ignoring 0.25, the studio should allow only six (6) persons at any time inside the studio, including staff.
- Allow only one (1) client and one (1) member of staff at any one time inside a studio with a total area less than 8 square metres.
- Ensure that clients are kept in the same work area as much as possible.
- Encourage clients to book an appointment online or by phone; appointments should be spaced to avoid clients coming into contact with each other; walk-ins should not be allowed - a sign to this effect should be put up outside the clinic.
- Records of appointments including contact details should be kept for a minimum of 4 weeks.
- Allow enough time for cleaning the work area / environment between clients. Clients should not be allowed in the clinic before the service of the previous client is completed and the clinic is sanitised.
- Ensure that the clinic is thoroughly cleaned with a disinfectant between clients. This includes couches, chairs, trolleys, wash hand basins. Door handles and any other surfaces should be cleaned regularly.
- Ensure that any sets of tools and/or equipment used during the service of a client is washed and sterilised after each client.

- Not allow clients to wait inside the clinic and advise them to arrive just before their appointment and leave immediately thereafter.
- Ensure that clients attend for the appointment on their own. Children should not accompany clients.
- Schedule courier and deliveries outside client times.
- Place floor stickers and signage that provide guidance for social distancing.
- Keep a record of the names, contact details and date of treatment/appointment for all clients in order to facilitate contact tracing should this be required.
- Remove non-essential items such as magazines.
- Not provide beverages and refreshments for clients. Clients should be advised to bring their own refreshment preferably water.
- Encourage contactless payment as much as possible.
- Ensure that employees who are sick STAY at home.
- Provide training and educational materials on sanitation, handwashing, cough and sneeze etiquette, use of face masks, visors, gloves and aprons, and other protective behaviours to prevent the spread of COVID19
- Ensure staff rooms are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized and not allow staff to congregate.
- Ensure that all wash hand basins in the workplace have antibacterial soap and paper towels available. No air flow driers or revolving cloth towels are allowed.
- Place handwashing signs in the restrooms.
- Provide alcohol wipes near the phone and payment stations.
- Consider flexible work schedules/hours to reduce the number of people (employees and clients) in studio at all times in order to maintain social distancing.
- Not perform procedures that involve the removal of the client's mask, such as facial acupuncture.
- Make all clients aware that contact details will be recorded and kept for four weeks for the purpose of contact tracing.

Communication with clients

- Clients should be contacted before their appointment asking whether they have had any respiratory symptoms for the last 7 days or if they are in mandatory quarantine.
- Telephone or virtual consultations should be conducted prior to appointment where possible in order to limit contact time in the clinic.
- Ensure that clients are aware of what is expected of them as part of the hygiene and infection control measures being practiced at the clinic BEFORE entering the clinic. These can be communicated to clients over the phone, via email or other appropriate virtual channels.
- Information about services, prices, aftercare and follow up appointments should be given electronically, over the phone or through virtual consultations to avoid handing out leaflets/papers/appointment cards etc.

Maintaining good hygiene practices

Staff should

- Avoid touching their eyes nose and mouth.
- Wash hands frequently especially:
 - Before, during (if required), and after each treatment/service to a client
 - Before putting on and after removing face masks, visors, gloves and aprons
 - Before and after cleaning tools, equipment and the environment in the studio
 - Before and after eating

- Before and after coffee breaks
- After using the rest room
- Upon arriving at work and at home

Washing hands with soap should be given priority over using alcohol hand rub. The application of alcohol hand rub should not be done in place of hand washing but rather as a complementary step AFTER handwashing or if hand washing is not convenient.

Alcohol hand rub should contain a minimum of 70% alcohol.

- Use disposable hand towels to dry hands and to open and turn off taps.
- Not use handshakes/hugs when greeting clients and colleagues.
- Monitor their personal health and condition for any symptoms, however mild.
- Wear uniforms at work which should be changed daily and washed after use. Uniforms/clothing worn at the clinic should not be worn at home.
- Use Separate footwear for the clinic.
- Keep towels in a cupboard or closed container. Used towels should be placed in an appropriate recipient (plastic bag or equivalent) to be taken directly for laundry.
- Keep nails short and do not apply acrylics.
- Keep hair tied back to avoid unnecessary touching of hair and face.
- Practice good respiratory etiquette requiring everyone at the clinic to, at all times:
 - cover their coughs and sneezes with a clean tissue or use their elbow (and no spitting)
 - avoid touching their face, eyes, nose and mouth
 - dispose of used tissues and cigarette butts hygienically, e.g. in closed bins
 - wash their hands before and after smoking a cigarette
 - clean and disinfect shared equipment and machinery after use
 - wash body, hair (including facial hair) and clothes thoroughly every day
 - have no intentional physical contact such as shaking hands and patting backs
- Staff who develop a mild cough, fever (i.e. a temperature of 37.2⁰C or higher), shortness of breath, headaches, tiredness, loss of taste, loss of smell or diarrhoea, should call the public health helpline on 111 giving details of their symptoms.

Use of Personal Protective Equipment by staff

- Staff should wear a surgical or cotton mask or visor when providing a service to a client.
- The face mask should completely cover the face from the bridge of the nose down to the chin. Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitiser before putting on and taking off the face mask. When taking off the face mask, remove it from behind, avoiding touching the front side. Dispose of the face mask safely by placing it in a plastic bag and put it in the trash if it is disposable. Wash your hands or apply 70% alcohol hand-rub immediately after removing the face mask. Washable, reusable face masks should be washed as soon as possible after each use, using common detergent at 60 °C.
- Surgical masks are not intended to be used more than once. If your mask is damaged or soiled, or if breathing through the mask becomes difficult, you should remove the face mask, discard it safely, and replace it with a new one.
- Visors should ideally be the reusable type and are disinfected appropriately in between clients.
- Gloves should be worn only to provide treatments/services that necessitated the use of gloves even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic for hygiene purposes or to prevent transmission of other infectious agents such as HIV and Hepatitis. Gloves should be changed and disposed of safely after every client.

- A disposable apron/gown should be worn and changed after every client.

Used PPE should be disposed of safely in the mixed waste stream (black bag), in double bags.



Clients (and suppliers)

- Should have their temperature checked using a contactless forehead thermometer before entering the clinic.
- Should apply alcohol hand rub upon entering the clinic. An appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub should be provided at the entrance of the clinic.
- Must wear a mask (covering mouth and nose and chin) at all times unless instructed otherwise by the service provider due to the treatment process.
- Should limit the personal belongings they bring with them ideally to just a mobile phone and mode of payment.

The Clinic Environment

- Doors and windows must be kept open, air-conditioning adjusted for more ventilation and recirculated air-conditioning avoided.

- Airconditioning flaps should be directed towards the ceiling. Filters should be cleaned well and maintained properly
- Extractors are recommended in every clinic. These must be thoroughly cleaned every week
- All precautions must be taken to ensure water systems are safe to prevent the risk of infections derived from water such as Legionnaire's disease. If the water supply is connected to the main water supply, flushing of the water system by opening all taps for a few minutes should suffice. However, if the supply of water is through a roof tank, this should be cleaned, and the water system is flushed through for a few minutes. It is important that the water heater temperature is raised to 60°C and thus there is no need to take samples and get approval from the Environmental Health Directorate. If the shop forms part of a complex or a hotel and the water supply is through the complex or hotel main water system, please follow the procedure indicated in Annex 1.
- The use of disposable towels is encouraged. If non-disposable towels are used, these must be changed after every client and washed at a temperature of at least 60 degrees Celsius.
- Clean towels must be stored in a closed container/cabinet.
- Baskets/bins used to hold soiled towels/linens must be cleaned and disinfected daily. Use a basket/bin that can be kept closed or used with liners which can be removed and discarded.
- Use disposable single use tools and supplies as much as possible to help reduce the risk of cross contamination.
- All tools that can be cleaned and reused must be sterilised / disinfected (strictly following manufacturer's instructions) using products that are tested to approved standards.
- Clean tools should be kept in a clean environment and properly covered until use.
- All used tools need to be stored in a specially marked closed container until cleansing and disinfection
- All equipment utilised during a treatment/service should be cleaned and disinfected after each use. This should be done in line with manufacturer's guidelines and one should consult with the providers of the equipment to verify what proper cleaning and disinfecting methods should be used.
- Do not forget to also clean the cords of electrical appliances.
- Ensure that all products such as dyes, etc. are stored in a closed container and if not, these should be discarded and replaced

Cleaning clinic surfaces is crucial to prevent and reduce the spread of viruses and other germs.

- Wear disposable gloves while cleaning and disinfecting the environment.
- Wipe down all surfaces (floors, worktops, trolleys, couches, chairs, sinks/basins etc) with medical grade disinfectant & cleaner following guidelines and let them air dry.
- Contact time on label must be observed for disinfectant to work. Contact time refers to how long the disinfectant is visibly wet on the surface allowing it to thoroughly destroy all the pathogens. Typical contact time for immersion/sprays is 10 minutes, for disinfectant wipes is 2-4 minutes.
- Remember to clean all touch points with medical grade disinfectant & cleaner frequently during the day. These include door push plates/handles, light switches, fridge handles, touch points on any shelving, soap dispenser, toilet flush and taps, card machine. Cleaning of the work area should be repeated after every client.
- Items on hard surfaces should be kept to a minimum.

- Where possible avoid using any materials or furniture in the clinic that are difficult to clean such as carpets, material couches, etc.

How to stay informed: www.covid19health.gov.mt

Annex 1

The following are the legal requirements to be carried out on the water systems prior re-opening of the premises:

1. Carry out a full system disinfection of the cold-water system, flushing through to all outlets to achieve 50 mg/l free chlorine for at least an hour checking that this level is achieved at the furthest outlets. This may be also achieved by making uses e.g. 5 mg/l for 10 hours (this all depends on the water piping system condition). It is important to top up when required throughout this process;
2. Flush out and refill the system to achieve maximum normal operating target levels of disinfection (equivalent to at least 0.2 mg/l free chlorine);
3. Refill and carry out a thermal shock by raising the temperature of the whole of the contents of the hot water storage heater from 70oC to 80oC then circulating this water throughout the system for up to three days. To be effective, the capacity and temperature of the hot water storage heater should be sufficient to ensure that the temperatures at the taps and appliances do not fall below 65oC. Each tap and appliance should be run sequentially for at least five minutes at the full temperature, taking appropriate precautions to minimise the risk of scalding;
4. Monitor temperatures and biocide levels where applicable, adjust where necessary, for at least 48-72 hours and then take Legionella samples from sentinel outlets (microbiological samples taken before 48 hours following disinfection may give false negative results);
5. Ensure you keep all documentation for inspection by the Competent Authority, including the review and update of the risk assessment manual including monitoring data, etc., with evidence of who carried out the monitoring, add time, date and signature;
6. Laboratory results for Legionella analysis which have to be carried out at an accredited laboratory, together with all the necessary documentation referred to in point 5 above and a declaration from the private water consultant under whom this water system treatment has been carried out are to be sent to the Water Regulatory and Auditing Unit within the Environmental Health Directorate prior reopening of the establishment;
7. Once it is found that your systems of the hot and cold water are under control then the establishment can reopen.