

## **Statement from the International Organisation of Aquatic Physical Therapists (IOAPT) about COVID-19 and the practice of Aquatic Physiotherapy**

Date: 12th of May 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance from IOAPT members regarding the practice of Aquatic Physiotherapy in countries around the world to prevent the transmission and spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

A global pandemic, resulting from COVID-19 is affecting a large proportion of countries around the world. Physiotherapists, as front line practitioners, will come into direct contact with patients that are infected by this virus or that are in contact with infected persons. It is essential that physiotherapists understand their role in identifying, containing, mitigating and treating the symptoms of this virus.

This includes:

1. implementing methods to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in the aquatic environment;
2. Initiating early identification strategies;
3. Dealing with identified cases appropriately in the work environments.

The global objective is to restrict the spread of COVID-19 by avoiding contact between people and promoting social isolation. Each country has established rules and restrictions, so IOAPT advises all physiotherapists to follow the official guidance and advice of the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) and the health authorities of your country.

There is no current evidence that COVID-19 can be spread to humans through the use of pools, cold or hot tubs.

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Proper operation, maintenance, and disinfection (e.g., with chlorine and bromine) of pools, cold and hot tubs should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19 (CDC – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; PWTAG - Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group, 2020; ASOFAP - Asociación Española de Profesionales del Sector Piscinas, 2020; RLSSA - Royal Life Saving Society Australia, 2020). The general guidelines provided by these organisations supports the following recommendations:

- *Frequent, regular, testing of the pool water for pH and disinfectant levels.*
- *That pH and disinfectant levels comply with local ordinances and regulations.*
- *Monthly bacteriological tests of pool water are carried out by an approved laboratory.*
- *To clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the pool environment, ensuring a frequent and regular cleansing regime of all areas used by the public.*

Additional recommendations include:

- *Users of swimming pools should be screened for symptoms prior to participating in any aquatic activity. If the person exhibits any symptoms, they should not participate in aquatic activity.*
- *Users of swimming pools need to shower before entering the pool to remove impurities typically found on bodies, and to shower immediately up on leaving the pool.*
- *Minimum health and safety recommendations and guidance must be adhered to according to the local health authorities.*
- *The reopening of aquatic facilities must be part of the gradual process of resuming of activities in accordance with the lifting of restrictions inherent to the implementation of the state of emergency for each country.*
- *Some restrictions relating to those over 65 (special and exclusive hours for senior users by appointment).*
- *The temporary suspension of free use or creation of a specific time for this use by appointment to accommodate social distancing in the facility;*

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- *Aquatic group sessions (water aerobics, Aquatic Physiotherapy, etc.) are only possible with advance booking while respecting social distancing guidelines (the distance from each person);*
- *The aerosols generated by the water present in a spa or in a medicinal water facility will have the same disinfection characteristics as the bath waters of these facilities.*
- *It is a priority that maintaining the safety distance between all users of the pool, whether in the water, on the pier / poolside and changing rooms.*
- *Efforts for cleaning / disinfecting the materials used in the aquatic physiotherapy sessions, each time they are used.*
- *Ensuring that ventilation systems of indoor spaces operate properly and increasing introduction and circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods.*
- *A risk assessment in relation to COVID-19 for each facility should consider each aquatic activity and appropriate risk minimisation strategies including but not limited to emergency planning and response, vulnerable persons, staff, contractor and visitor health, monitoring, physical distancing, hygiene, cleaning and Personal Protection Equipment (RLSSA, 2020) in conjunction with reviewing usual Aquatic Physiotherapy screening, referral, safety and supervision processes (APA - Australian Physiotherapy Association, 2015)*

The CDC also published a guidance for reopening buildings after prolonged shutdown or reduced operation that it is important to take into account.

All decisions about implementing these considerations should be made locally, in collaboration with local health officials. Operators of public aquatic venues can consult with local officials to determine if and how to implement these considerations while adjusting them to meet the unique needs and circumstances of the local jurisdiction. Their implementation should also be informed by what is feasible, practical, and acceptable.

Since there is uncertainty and complex local variables that arises from this pandemic, the IOAPT recognizes that it is imperative for clinicians and facilities to follow the local jurisdiction guidelines for resuming aquatic activities focusing on the safety of participants and minimizing any potential transmission of the virus.

*Note: this document is the position of the IOAPT in 12 May 2020. There will be appropriate updates whenever new information proves necessary, according to international/national rules and guidelines and taking into account the evolution of the pandemic at national, regional and local levels.*

## **The International Organisation of Aquatic Physical Therapists (IOAPT), a WCPT Subgroup**

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