

COVID-19: Practice Protocol

A. Measures to ensure the safety and well-being of our patients during and after the lock-down period:

Please note: All of our staff members have been vaccinated against COVID-19 with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

1. Infection control

The following standard precautions are taken:

- **Hand sanitizer** that contains at least 60% alcohol is used before and after contact with every patient. The patient's hands are also sanitized upon entering the practice.
- **Face masks** or clear face shields are worn by audiologist/therapist and patient. Children are not *obligated* to wear a face mask behind the perspex during speech therapy as the therapist will at all times be wearing a clear face shield. Necessity of face mask during audio testing to be explored. Most patients may find it difficult to breathe properly inside the booth while face mask is worn.
- **Close contact** is avoided. At least a meter distance between patient and audiologist/therapist wherever possible. Feedback on evaluation is to be given where sufficient flow of fresh air is available.
- **Frequently touched surfaces** are cleaned and disinfected after each patient. This includes doorknobs, handles, switches, buttons, tables, countertops, desks, stationary and phones.
- **Time between patients** is maximized. At least 45 minutes are allowed between patients to allow time for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and also to avoid patient overlap in the waiting area.
- **Audio booth** is to be cleaned and all contact surfaces sterilized after each patient. At least one hour waiting time should be allowed between each patient to allow time for booth to "air". Better ventilation options to be explored.
- **Hearing aids** are thoroughly cleaned upon reception from patients. The patient will receive back sterilized hearing aids. Other necessities such as hearing aid batteries will also be wiped with alcohol swabs and placed in a plastic bag before handed back to the patient.
- **Toys and therapy materials** will be cleaned and disinfected after use with each pasiënt

Speech therapy sessions: Will continue at the practice with strict standardised precautions. Alternatively, therapists will be available to conduct therapy sessions via Whatsapp video call, Skype or Zoom.

2. Online Therapy/Tele-therapy

It provides a safe form of service during the COVID-19 Pandemic and ensured that patients still receive professional services during lockdown regulations. As an added benefit online therapy is cost effective for our patients that does not reside in Bloemfontein. Patients reported that it saves travelling costs and their children responded better in the session because they are in their natural environment and not tired due to traveling. Parents are involved and use what they have in their homes and the guidelines and resources provided per email by therapist before the sessions. We use Zoom as 'n platform and patients can use their phones or computers to attend the session virtually. Our team invested in training and equipment to broaden our services in this field and receive positive feedback from our patients.

B. High risk population

Criteria for high risk population are stipulated below as obtained from a reliable source.

1. Criteria for persons to be tested for COVID-19

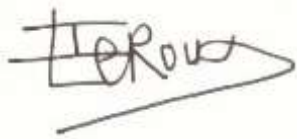
Persons with acute respiratory illness with sudden onset of at least one of the following, irrespective of admission status:

- cough,
- sore throat,
- shortness of breath or
- fever (38°C or higher measured, or history of fever).

2. Characteristics of persons at higher risk

A person with an acute respiratory illness and who, in the 14 days prior to onset of symptoms, met at least one of the following criteria:

- Were in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19;
- Had a history of travel to areas with local transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (consult NICD website);
- Worked in or attended a healthcare facility where patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection were being treated;
- Admitted with severe pneumonia of unknown origin.



Ilouise le Roux

Speech language therapist / Audiologist

M. Communication Pathology