

## Update: March 3

On January 29, 2021, Premier Kenney presented the Government of Alberta's *Path Forward Plan* to gradually ease public health measures and restrictions. Step 1 of the plan took effect on February 8, and on March 1<sup>st</sup>, Premier Kenney, Minister Shandro, and Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Hinshaw announced a modified Step 2 to take effect immediately. The Step 1 changes had limited impact on physiotherapy practice.

## Group Exercise Interventions

Step 2 includes an easing of restrictions on low intensity group exercise classes, which will have implications for physiotherapists who offer interventions such as GLA:D programs, falls and balance classes, or Parkinson's group classes. These programs are now permitted provided:

- The class is not focused specifically on cardio and results in a low depth and rate of respiration for participants.
- The physiotherapist and the class participants remain masked.
- The physiotherapist and class participants are separated by three meters at all times.
- Class participants do not interact with each other.
- Class participants do not cycle through multiple staff at different stations (as would occur with a circuit training program)

High intensity exercise training continues to be permitted on a 1:1 basis only, with several additional restrictions in effect. Although this type of intervention is not commonly applied by physiotherapists, those regulated members who provide this type of intervention, who work in fitness and recreation facilities, or collaborate with kinesiologists or personal trainers must be aware of and compliant with the rules established by the Government of Alberta, which are outlined on the [Government of Alberta website](#) under "Indoor Fitness".

When providing any group intervention, physiotherapists are advised to carefully consider the population involved and risks and benefits anticipated from offering a group intervention to members of that population in light of the current case numbers, virus variants in circulation, and the potential vaccine status of participants.

## Long-Term Care Residents and Vaccines

Public health experts have clearly identified that COVID-19 poses a serious threat to people residing in communal living settings. Although many, if not most residents of these settings have now received at least one, if not both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, resuming "normal activities" in these long-term care and congregate settings must be undertaken with caution for several reasons, as discussed by Dr. Hinshaw on March 1<sup>st</sup>:

- Individuals need time to develop immunity following receipt of the vaccine.

- Although vaccines have been found to be highly effective at preventing serious illness or death due to COVID-19, it is not yet clear if vaccines also prevent transmission of the virus from those who have been vaccinated to those who are not yet vaccinated or are unable to be vaccinated.
- Although vaccines have been found to be highly effective, they have not been demonstrated to be 100% effective at preventing serious illness or death. Some individuals may still be at risk despite having received both doses of the vaccine.

Treatment of this population continues to pose an ethical dilemma:

- Without treatment many patients will deteriorate, and some may potentially die.
- With treatment, and despite clinicians' best efforts, there continues to be some risk of exposing patients to COVID-19, with the potential of causing serious illness or death.

Physiotherapists working in this setting must remain vigilant and must continue to comply with the measures in effect to limit the spread of COVID-19, despite the vaccine status of their patients.

The roll out of vaccinations to community dwelling seniors over the age of 75 is a promising development which will have implications for physiotherapists across all sectors and settings, however as public health officials have repeatedly stated, it will be many months before all individuals who wish to be vaccinated will have received both doses. In the interval, the rising numbers of virus variants and ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 require that physiotherapists continue to adhere to public health measures designed to protect their patients and themselves from the virus. As always, Physiotherapy Alberta's Practice Advisor is available to answer questions regarding the measures required.