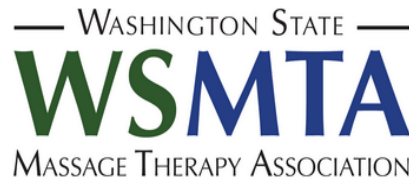


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Masking and Social Distancing Requirements for Health Care Providers (Massage Therapists)

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What is Required? As health care providers, massage therapists must follow federal, state and local laws which include both Washington State Labor & Industries (L&I) and Governor requirements that relate to health care.

The following two documents regarding social distancing and mask wearing were made available this June 2021 on the "COVID-19 Reopening Guidance for Businesses and Workers" website:

- <https://lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/f414-169-000.pdf>
- <https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/COVID19%20Facial%20Coverings%20Guidance.pdf>

The L&I document states that health care settings must maintain social distance between people regardless of vaccination status and the governor's document states that anyone within a health care facility (workers, visitors and patients) must remain masked regardless of vaccination status. Please note that websites are changing fast, so if these links are not available look at: <https://www.governor.wa.gov/issues/issues/covid-19-resources/covid-19-reopening-guidance>.

What does "Health Care" Mean in These Memos? In these memos, "health care" does not include just long-term care, hospitals and doctor's offices. John Stebbins, from DOSH L&I, states, "massage therapy is considered health care and the masking requirements will apply wherever the work is done. We are working with the Department of Health (DOH) on this and they use a broad definition of health care based on state licensing requirements. If the facility or practitioner are licensed by DOH, then that is health care." Wherever massage therapists practice, this is health care and the area of a building they practice in is a health care setting.

Last year, when Governor Inslee announced Proclamation 20-24.1 (Restart of Medical Services in Washington), WSMTA worked with the Department of Health to get clarification of what that meant for massage therapists. Kristin Peterson, the Assistant Secretary for HSQA of the Department of Health, stated, "The department has clarified..., a licensed massage therapist is providing a "health care service" and this service can be provided at any location statewide...". The Assistant Secretary had much more to say, the full memo can be found at:

<https://www.mywsmta.org/resources/Documents/COVID%2019/HSQA%2020-24.1%20Reply%20on%20053120.jpg>

What Does This Mean for Massage Therapists? Massage therapists work in many different settings – home, office, clinic, gym, resort, hotel, day spa, nail salon, etc. This means, that wherever LMTs practice, the portion of the location that is practiced in, is a health care setting, even if it is a single treatment room where massage is done within a non-health care facility.

If a licensed massage therapist (LMT) works for, or leases space from, a non-health care facility (for example a gym) the owner of the non-health care facility can set the standards for their customers/guests within their facility. However, when it comes to the massage treatment room(s), or area(s) used to do massage, the requirements set by federal, state, and local agencies that regulate health care providers apply when it is being used for the purpose of doing massage. In this instance, the governor's document on masking (referenced above) requires anyone entering a health care setting -- in this situation, a massage treatment room -- to wear a mask to be in the room when it is used for the purpose of doing massage. When a person leaves the massage treatment room, that person can choose to wear a mask or take it off depending on the policy that has been set by the owner of the non-healthcare facility the massage room is in.

How to Manage This? For all LMTs, WSMTA's recommendation is to create a policy about mask wearing which states you are following WA State requirements set by the governor and post it in the treatment room. In non-health care settings, we also suggest that this policy be posted where information is presented about massage in the non-health care facility. We would also suggest having a box of 3-ply disposable masks available in the massage room so individual masks can be provided for those who might not have brought masks as a courtesy to the client/patient. LMTs can also post this flyer (or the governor and L&I documents) or make it available as a handout to clients/patients who are having issues with masking in the treatment room. In these changing times, it will also help to provide information on masking requirements to clients/patients before they arrive, so they are not surprised.

Questions? If you, your employer, or landlord have questions about masking and social distancing for health care providers/facilities, please contact: John Stebbins, CSP, CIH -- L&I -- Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) -- (206) 515-2870.