



Guidance for branches on organising physical sessions

Please aware that this guidance could be superseded at any time by a change in Government guidance both locally and nationally. You must follow the specific advice for your country and your local area.

This guidance was initially created in August 2020 and was updated in May 2021.

It is based upon advice from the [Chartered Society of Physiotherapy](#) and the [Aquatic Therapy Association of Chartered Physiotherapists](#) guidance for physiotherapists on running patient exercises classes and aquatic therapy. This guidance is, in part, itself based upon UK government advice for [providers of grassroots sport and gym/leisure facilities](#).

Deciding whether to return to physical meetings

Many NASS branches have run virtual, online exercise sessions which have been very successful. If you think you may be ready to return to physical sessions you must first consult with your branch members and physiotherapists. Preferably organise a meeting online or outdoors in a physically distanced way. Everyone should be able to have their say.

Do consider whether you might be able to keep online meetings as an option for your members.

If you haven't yet set up online sessions but aren't able to go back and would like to give them a try then use the 'Guide to setting up virtual sessions' which you can download from the [Branch resource area](#) on our website.

General health screening of members

Each member should complete an updated health form provided by your physiotherapist. Any important changes in health over the past 12 months should be highlighted and discussed in advance of your first session. Hydrotherapy may not be suitable for people with certain health conditions including unstable blood pressure, uncontrolled diabetes and angina or shortness of breath at rest so it's vital a detailed screening is undertaken prior to any sessions restarting after a period of non-attendance (for example, after the COVID-19 pandemic).

No branch member should be able to access these completed forms. The physiotherapist should store them safely in line with GDPR requirements.

Ongoing it is important that every member is aware that they must inform their NASS physiotherapist on any given week should their general health change.



Member responsibility when attending sessions during the Covid 19 pandemic

Members must **understand and agree** that they **will not** attend the branch if they have the [main symptoms of COVID-19](#) as defined by the NHS. These symptoms include:

- A high temperature (feel hot to touch or your chest or back)
- A new continuous cough (coughing a lot for more than an hour or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours)
- A loss or change to your sense of taste or smell

They must also not attend if:

- Anyone in the household is in self-isolation or experiencing any of the above symptoms
- They have been in contact with anyone with confirmed COVID-19 within the last 10 days
- They, or anyone in their household have been contacted by the Track and Trace service and asked to self isolate
- They have returned to the UK in the past 14 days from another country

Please do ensure your members are reminded of their responsibilities regularly to keep your sessions safe for everyone. You should consider a system where a reminder communication is sent to all members each week on the above points. For example, it could be a text message, WhatsApp or email.

You should discuss with your physiotherapists how a record of any symptomatic members will be held and actioned if necessary. So, who will members inform if they become symptomatic after the branch meeting?

Please do ensure your members are reminded of their responsibilities regularly to keep your sessions safe for everyone.

You should not ask members to reveal their vaccination status and you cannot exclude anyone from attending sessions because they have not been fully vaccinated. It is not necessary to separate members into vaccinated or non-vaccinated group sessions



Your venue

Hospital gyms

Most NASS branches meet in hospital gyms. Please do discuss the possibility of your NASS branch returning to your hospital gym with the physiotherapy department. Be aware that infection control may well need to be involved and detailed planning and risk assessment may be required before permission is granted.

The numbers allowed to use hospital gyms at any time are likely to be much lower than in the past. This may mean your members will need to divide into an A and B group, meeting alternate weeks. Do consider how satisfactory that will be for members and what it will mean in terms of cost.

Please do ask for help from NASS if needed. We have lots of examples of branches who have made significant changes to get back and we can also directly put you in contact with a branch who may be able to help. If you'd like to share anything you've tried or ask for help from the branch network then don't forget you can email branches@nass.co.uk and your email will go to all branches. Just remember this only works if you email from your branch email account.

Outdoor sessions

If your hospital gym does not look likely to welcome you back just yet and your members want to return to physical sessions you may wish to consider exercising outdoors over the summer months. In terms of COVID19 this would be a very safe approach. However, do check your physiotherapist feels comfortable running sessions outdoors.

- Try to find an area where you can socially distance, where there won't be too many other people around and where the ground is fairly firm and even.
- Ensure everyone brings their own equipment (e.g. mats and stretch bands) and takes it home at the end of the session.
- Outdoor sessions are very weather dependent so do set up a WhatsApp group beforehand to ensure everyone is kept in the loop on whether or not you are meeting.

If your members don't want to stretch outside, consider organising a [Nordic Walking](#) session. There are instructors all around the country and they will bring along the equipment for you all. If you'd like to chat to another branch who have used Nordic Walking please get in contact with us.

Alternatively, you could consider meeting for a walk in the park, ending up with a picnic or a coffee.

Another option as things start to re-open is meeting for a swim. This works especially well if you have a lido near you.



Local halls and leisure centres

An alternative would be a move to a local hall or leisure centre. When considering local halls please consider:

1. Maximum capacity should be based on the government requirement for social distancing.
2. The maximum occupancy of each indoor facility should be limited by providing a minimum of 100 square feet per person (approximately 9 square metres). For this figure, the area is the net useable indoor facility space available per person using that space, including changing rooms, toilets and washing facilities.
3. Particular attention should be given to ventilation and sufficient circulation space, especially around equipment and between classes. There is no government guidance on the type of ventilation required beyond the fact that ventilation is necessary, and that systems should provide 100 per cent fresh air and not recirculate air from one space to another. So, a hall where you can open the windows would be best. Windows and doors (if possible) must be kept open at all times.

Ask the hall for their protocols with regard to both risk assessment and cleaning. You must keep a copy of this in your branch files.

Hydrotherapy pools

The Aquatic Therapy Association of Chartered Physiotherapists have produced recommendations for safe aquatic therapy practice. We expect that your venue will follow this guidance and will produce venue-specific guidance for your members to follow. These guidelines are likely to mean:

- Numbers allowed in the pool will be reduced. This is because 2 metre social distancing is recommended in the pool as well as through the reception, changing area and poolside. This may mean dividing into A and B groups and meeting alternate weeks or for shorter time periods. Be aware this may well increase your costs.
- It is very likely you will be asked to arrive pool-ready to minimise time in the changing area. It is very likely you will be asked to shower thoroughly before entering the pool. It may not be possible to shower and change properly after the session.

Do keep a copy of the venue protocols in your branch files.



Responsibility of attendees

Please ensure anyone attending NASS branches has read and understood the guidance on attending branch sessions. You may wish to get people to email you to say they agree to abide by the guidance or you could get them to sign and date a copy for your records.

Everyone should be reminded about the guidance ahead of each branch session.

Entering and exiting the venue

Entrances and exits are pinch points where people may find it difficult to socially distance. Do liaise with your chosen venue and ensure you follow any recommendations they have in place.

Ask your members to leave a 2 metre gap between themselves and the next member. You may need to wear masks when entering and exiting in order to meet government guidelines. Members should socially distance outside the venue if they arrive early.

On arrival members should sanitise their hands. If the venue has not provided hand sanitiser, you should purchase hand sanitiser for members to use.

Use of the venue

Members should be encouraged to utilise as little of the venue as possible. Avoid use of any kitchen or toilet facilities unless absolutely necessary. Make members aware of the venue guidance on use of these facilities.

Changing rooms should not be used unless absolutely necessary (e.g. for hydrotherapy).

Items like bags, coats and other personal items should not be brought into the venue.

Ensure members are familiar with the rules of the venue. It's likely that each venue will have its own very specific rules and it's important you and your members understand these and undertake to follow them carefully.

Use of cleaning products

Please note that any sanitising products used should be at least 70% alcohol in order to be effective against the spread of COVID-19.

Any paper towels or wet wipes used should be immediately disposed of in the bin.



Exercise session

Discuss with your lead physiotherapist and members what is likely to be the safest way of running your sessions.

Indoor stretch sessions should only involve members sitting, standing or lying on a mat in their own personal space throughout the session. Do not include cardiovascular exercise to avoid people breathing heavily.

The physiotherapist should not touch any member to adjust their position or guide stretch.

Ideally mark out a 3 metre space for each attending member in chalk or with a hoop.

Under government guidance it is important to avoid raised voices. Therefore, we would suggest you do not use music.

Equipment

Everyone must bring their own mat, head cushion, woggle, floats etc. No shared equipment should be used. These should be marked to avoid confusion. If your members have been paying fees over the year or you have plenty of funds it might be a nice idea to buy a set of equipment for everyone out of the collected funds.

Accidents

In an emergency, for example, an accident, provision of first aid or fire, people do not have to stay appropriately distanced if it would be unsafe.

People involved in the provision of assistance to others should pay particular attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards including washing hands. If you are meeting in an NHS run venue your physiotherapists will be following guidelines set out by their Infection Control team.

Taking a register

Do ensure a careful register is kept of attendees as this is needed for Track and Trace. To meet the Track and Trace requirements your members must supply you with a current telephone number. Alternatively, an email address or postal address is acceptable if necessary.



Payment

It would be preferable for all members to pay by electronic bank transfer into the branch account. The physiotherapist should be paid in the same way.

If this is not possible, the fee should be placed directly into a container. It would be preferable that no change is given.

Risk assessment form

NASS has produced a risk assessment for your branch to complete. Use this guide and the advice from your chosen venue and your lead physiotherapist to complete the risk assessment.

Some suggestions have been made in the form as to what you should include but don't hesitate to add more. Once the form is complete please run it past your physiotherapist and other committee members and then send a copy to sally@nass.co.uk.