

BCA Neuropsychology Group - Post-Acute Staged Re-opening: Principles and Guidelines

As we are all aware, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are dealing with uncertainty – and uncertainty means there is no black and white. Like everything in life, there are risks that need to be managed regarding your treatment and assessment, but our aim is to minimize as many risks as we can while continuing to offer quality neuropsychological services. The following is a list of principles and guidelines that we are using to manage the risks and uncertainty with the next step in this community health crisis. We encourage you to review these points but also to weigh your own risks and benefits regarding attending our office in person.

1. What are the risks?

The provincial lockdown had to do with ensuring that our healthcare system was not overwhelmed by the effects COVID-19 pandemic. The key phrase guiding the initial phase was “flatten the curve”. That goal has been accomplished. As of June 2, 2020 there were 666 reported cases of COVID-19 in Niagara. Long-term care facilities and health care workers accounted for 48% (320) of cases and 81% of deaths. 17% (113) of all cases required hospitalization. As we begin the process of re-opening there are 46 active cases of COVID in the Niagara Region, which represents .0001% of the population. By comparison over a similar period of time (in 2016) Niagara Region reported 814 emergency department visits due motor vehicle crashes and 79 hospital admissions. Our role with clients is often to help them accept the uncertainty and risk associated with driving, so we are in a good position to be leaders in assisting individuals to accept the risk with moving forward in the post-acute stage of COVID-19. The provincial plan regarding re-opening is a balance of risks with the benefits of resuming some aspects of “normal life”. At BCA Neuropsychology Group, we too are striving to appreciate the ongoing risks of COVID-19 while at the same time endeavouring to resume our normal services, in a staged fashion. We appreciate that each of our clients is an individual and, therefore, the balance of risks vs. benefits will likely be slightly different for each person and, like everything in neuropsychology, there is no “one size fits all.”

2. We can only move forward by taking the first step and learning from each step.

There is no “rulebook” here. Lots of people are sharing ideas and guidelines and certainly the principles here are consistent with what those in leadership (e.g., government and the organizations who oversee the practice of psychology) are suggesting. We have to learn by doing. It won’t be perfect, but we will always do our best to learn from experience each step of the way. We accept that procedures and guidelines need to be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances. As we’re sure you are aware of, the guidelines regarding the “do’s” and “don’t’s” related to COVID-19 are frequently changing and we will adapt our policies accordingly.

3. We will move forward in the same way as BCA has always operated.

Our business exists to meet the psychological needs of our clients and our community. We strive to provide science and evidenced-based assessment and treatment services. We remain flexible in our approach to clients and personnel, accommodating individual needs and preferences to the extent that it doesn’t produce undue hardship or creates harm/risk to others. We identify challenges and then focus on solutions, where possible, and allow for uncertainty when there are no immediate solutions. We work as a team, and we all contribute to solutions. No team member nor client will be asked to do things that others are not willing to do.

4. What are we doing to mitigate risks.

- Reconfiguring the environment to support social distancing (e.g., closing the waiting room, arranging furniture in offices to allow for social distancing, utilizing plexiglass shields where social distancing is not possible).
- Screening clients regarding health status related to COVID-19.
- Implementing stricter office hygiene and sanitation protocols.
- Providing masks for staff and clients at clients' requests. Masks are not mandatory because they can interfere with clinical care and can create emotional distress for some clients, especially those with a trauma history.
- Discouraging fluid intake and use of washroom where possible.
- Monitoring risk – we will review our guidelines if there is a significant increase in risk, including a potential “second wave”.
- Revising our consent forms to include detailed information about the risks related to COVID-19 of attending our office in person. Even existing clients will need to sign that they understand these new risks and that they have weighed the pros and cons of attending.
- Not penalizing clients or personnel who stay home when experiencing any COVID-like symptoms. Clients and staff who exhibit symptoms or who meet any significant risks factors (e.g., contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19) will not be permitted to enter the office.

5. Phased Re-Opening

The goal of a phased re-opening model is to allow a slow re-entry of clients into our physical space to allow for everyone to become confident in following the new guidelines for operation. In the acute stage of the pandemic, when only urgent in-person care was permitted, about 97% of our services were delivered virtually. The goal during Re-opening Phase 1 is to deliver at least 80% of our services virtually and gradually increase the number of individuals coming into the office.

- Phase 1: Assessments & Re-introduce Treatment clients who are not being served well by virtual care (Target start date: ~June 12, 2020)
- Phase 2: New Referrals with the option to provide service virtually once the initial intake is conducted (Target: throughout summer 2020)
- Phase 3: Return to In-Office Treatment based on client choice (Target: fall 2020)
- Phase 4: Full Return to In-Office services (TBA based on guidance from government and our provincial organizations)

**** Should you have any questions or concerns that are not addressed here, please speak to your treatment provider or call the office at 905 227 2264. ****