

Dated: April 19, 2020

COVID-19: ADVISORY FROM AIOTA

(With updated information)

Dear Members, Student Members, OT Education Centers and OT Practitioners

WHO has declared COVID-19 as a Pandemic on 11th March 2020. We are stunned and so is the whole world. The impact on health and lives due to deadly COVID -19 is still on increase. The health system globally is feeling helpless due to volume of the patients and deaths. Unfortunately there seems to be no answer to an effective treatment and or vaccination for this entirely new virus. The Pandemic has grossly overburdened the healthcare infrastructure of even the most developed countries, and is expected to cause post-covid severe global economic recession an issue of great concern for all. The only tested and proved measures are breaking the chain of spreading it through social & physical distancing and to achieve this long shutdown of the countries are being observed.

Statistics as on today due to Corona Outbreak in India and Government Response: (April 19): Confirmed Cases (15712), Recovered (2230) and Deaths (507). No. of deaths due to COVID-19 is relatively much less in India if compared to countries like USA (39015), UK (15464), Italy (23227), Spain (20639) and France (19323) etc. However the figures are rapidly changing every hour, the world over. Looks like that in coming few days Stage-3 i.e. Community Transmission may be at the door steps in India, but fortunately government response under the potential leadership of Honorable PM Sri Narendra Modi is fast and impressive to contain community spread even after more than 3 months when first case was reported in Kerala. If the statistics continue to show a relatively low infection rate as on today, in relation to our large population, the second highest after China, then India will likely to succeed in containing the coronavirus pandemic.

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): The Simple Prevention Strategies: The disease is infectious causing respiratory illness (like flu) with symptoms such as a dry cough, high fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty breathing. It spreads primarily through contact with an infected person when they cough or sneeze. It also spreads when a person touches a surface or objects that has the virus on it, and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth. The most important factor in preventing the spread of the virus locally, is to empower the citizens with the right information and taking precautions, as per the advisories being issued by Ministry of Health, which broadly include frequently sanitizing/washing hands & face after touching the surfaces, person and objects and avail of 24x7 helpline nos. besides avoiding crowded places.

We can protect ourselves by simply washing and sanitizing hands & face frequently, avoiding touching the face, and avoiding close contact (1-2 meter or 3-6 feet) with people who are unwell.

Are we prepared? AIOTA officials are seriously concerned about good health and well-being of the members, their families and the community. The key to overcome the challenge is Protection and Primary Prevention. The Protection should be in 3 phases: Self Protection, Family Protection followed with Community Protection. All are hereby advised to strictly follow the guidelines by Union and State Governments, which are freely made available on print and electronic media, by sensitizing self, family and community, as under:

The other most significant globally advised directions are:

Social (Physical) Distancing: Staying at least six feet away from other people to lessen the chances of infection, working from home instead of at the office, switching to online classes in place of institution premises, communicating with loved ones by electronic devices instead of in-person and cancelling or postponing conferences and large meetings. The elderly's with underlying medical conditions [risk the severest consequences](#), hence they should be cared for, at home.

Self-quarantine for 14 days: People who have been exposed to the new coronavirus and who are at risk for coming down with COVID-19 must practice self-quarantine for 14 days at home. It provides enough time to know whether or not, one will become ill, and be contagious to other people.

COVID-19 and Occupational Therapists Role:

We as occupational therapist professionals recognize the consequences and changes that are occurring, in how people access and undertake their occupations, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also understand the vital need to access and use infection control measures, combined with the need to sustain good psychological, mental health and stamina, in order to stay safe and healthy. Occupational Therapists are in the best position to determine what is essential in their specific practice settings in making decisions regarding the reduction or elimination of non-essential and elective services.

Occupational Therapy professionals should be guided by the following principles:

Proportionality: Decision to eliminate services should be proportionate to the real or anticipated limitations in capacity to provide those services. The Occupational Therapy Centers and Private Clinics should avoid therapeutic services in accordance with the national/state policies in this respect. Those working in Government Services or as a part of the mandatory healthcare team should strictly practice proper sanitization and distance protocols while prescribing/executing therapy to in-bound patients.

Reciprocity: Certain patients and patient populations (Especially Children with special needs and Elderly) should have the option to have their health monitored, receive appropriate care, and be re-evaluated for emergent activities, should it be required. Decisions regarding the reduction or elimination of non-essential and elective services should be made using processes that are fair to all patients.

Tele-Health Services: All Occupational Therapists especially working in the private sector and self-owned Therapy Centers should be readily available on the Phone, WhatsApp and or Email so that any specific queries or apprehensions of the caregivers /clients can be addressed, as and when needed.

Consultation Services during Physical Distancing and/or Self-Quarantine: As occupational therapists we are in a strong position to advise people on how to stay well, while when physical distancing by mode of Tele-health, Phone, Social Media and Internet etc. During this period of physical distancing and/or self-quarantine, It is essential to look after mental and emotional well-being as well as the physical health considering the age and gender of every patients and their caregivers. Occupational Therapists can formulate strategies for daily goals of activities of daily living, healthy food including milk & fruits for good immune system and home cooked meals, regular physical exercises, talking to family, friends and neighbor on phone & social media etc. which is essential to avoid staying still for long. A good sleep routine is must, to stay healthy, during physical distancing, and whilst at home, for developing good immunity, to combat the threat of virus.

Consultation for Elderly: The elderly's with underlying medical conditions, risk the severest consequences. We must make sure they are protected. They should be advised to learn new technology like Emails, Skype, Facebook, Zoom and Twitter etc. to stay connected. They may also be advised to interact with community, family and friends from home to protect their emotional and mental health. Do understand that social-distancing should not be considered as social isolation.

Government Directives: Members are advised to follow the guidelines as above and also take self-decisions, as and when required as responsible professionals, to extend necessary assistance, for the timely need of the community and abide by the central and state government policies as and when desired from us all, whether working in public or private sector, to combat with the serious challenge of this century. Also, remember that the protection of self is essential to assist others.

Self-Engagement: The AIOTA urges its members, and thereby their near and dear ones, peers and colleagues and fellow citizens of India, to productively utilize “stay at home” and “work from home”, by engaging in purposeful and meaningful occupations to remain “healthy” as defined by WHO (not just mere absence of illness, but by being fit physically, mentally, socially and emotionally) and also by following physical distancing and self-hygiene protocols, thereby, to also build immunity against the viral threat. Remember, “You cannot pour from an empty cup” Therefore, it is vital to remain healthy first, to enable us to help others around us.

During Long Shutdown of Cities: as preventive measures to check the spread of Covid-19, the citizens living in your vicinity and also known to you, should be advised to stay happy, communicative but careful, by religiously following the guidelines with a positive approach.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious threat, to our people in India; hence, it should not be taken lightly, and we all together must help lessen the spread by responsibly performing our deeds, to make a big difference to our health, and that of others around in the community at a state, national and global level. AIOTA is looking forward to get informed of your contribution to combat this serious challenge posing threat to our people at large.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anil K. Srivastava', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. Anil K. Srivastava
President, AIOTA

Acknowledgement:

The valuable inputs from AIOTA officials- Ex-officio- Dr. Shashi Oberai, Formerly EC Member -Dr. Neeraj Mishra, Editor -IJOT Dr. Punita Solanki, Executive Editor Dr. Lakshmanan S. Dean ACOT Dr. Jyothika Bijlani and Hon. Secretary Dr. Joseph Sunny is gratefully acknowledged.



ALL INDIA OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS' ASSOCIATION

Founder Council Member World Federation of Occupational Therapists
Registered Under Bombay Public Trust Act, Bom. 1950-E-1118

AIOTA National HQ : 801, 8th Floor, Business Bay, Plot No. 51, Sector 1, Nerul, Navi Mumbai - 400706, Maharashtra, India | Tel. : +91-22-27701801 | www.aiota.org