



COVID-19 FAQ: Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physical Therapy (PT)

April 16, 2020

(512) 463-9000

disasterinfo@tea.texas.gov

tea.texas.gov/coronavirus

From the TEA COVID-19 FAQ: Special Education in Texas Document

Occupational and physical therapy (OT and PT respectively) are related services that typically require therapists providing direct services to be in close physical proximity to their students. This need for physical proximity creates significant barriers to the provision of direct services to these students during the COVID 19 pandemic response. The following includes considerations and key points to assist LEAs as they work to most effectively move these direct services typically provided to students to an indirect, or consultative, model of service delivery in which families and caregivers are the individuals working to implement services.

There is no defined or correct method to adequately and equitably meet the needs of all students in an unprecedented event such as the current COVID-19 pandemic response. Local education agencies (LEAs) need to be flexible and consider employing a variety of delivery options as they make reasonable efforts to provide services to students with disabilities. Above all, LEAs should prioritize the health and safety of students, staff, and communities. The next priority for LEAs is to communicate with families regarding service provision. Families should be directly involved in planning for temporary changes to services provided to students during the COVID 19 pandemic response.

LEAs should identify and acknowledge service delivery limitations, while they make and document reasonable efforts to provide students eligible for special education with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This requirement to “make every effort...” or “make a reasonable effort” does not allow a LEA to decline all services to students eligible for special education and only offer compensatory services at a later time.

Please note that the “COVID 19 Special Education Q&A” posted on the [Special Education and Special Populations](#) page of the [TEA Coronavirus \(COVID 19\) Support and Guidance](#) website is updated regularly and contains policy guidance related to the provision of ancillary and related services such as OT and PT.

Considerations for the Provision of Services

The following questions are for school-based occupational therapists and physical therapist to consider when providing remote services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- What resources do the families have available at home that can be used to support instruction?
 - Technology access
 - Objects and materials to use in therapy
 - Therapy Equipment (e.g., walkers, standers, etc.)
- Are there barriers to delivering instruction that need to be planned for, such as family or student health, language, cultural, family resources, etc.?
- What IEP goals can be addressed based on student and family priorities and safety considerations?
- Are there any concerns about confidentiality or privacy that may impact instruction?

Keys Points

- Keep the best interest of the student in mind, considering their current situation. Prioritize decisions based on health and safety first.
- Work with the family and keep them informed of what and how services and interventions will be provided.
- Be sure to progress monitor regularly. Document skills and progress prior to school closure (What was the most recent progress update/information from your therapy notes and/or IEP goal progress updates?) to use as comparison for progress while providing remote therapy.
- Keep detailed documentation of what services are and are not able to be provided in order to make informed decisions once schools resume normal operations.

Resources to Implement Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- [ESC 13 COVID OT-PT Resources Google Page](#): Set of resources, including a checklist of items that can be found in the home to be used for OT/PT, sample schedules, and ideas of activities that can be done at home.
- [ESC 10 Therapy News Newsletter](#): Lists websites for fine and gross motor activities, along with other useful information.
- [ESC 1 At-Home Related Services Supports](#): Section of ESC 1's Resources to Support a Free and Appropriate Public Education Instructional Continuity Plan for Students with Disabilities webpage that gives resources for OT, PT, and Speech Therapy supports.
- [TxSpot Resources Page](#): TxSpot is a service and website provided by the Harris County Department of Education. They provide links to resources for telehealth, OTs, PTs, teachers, administrators, and families all related to occupational and physical therapy.
- [School-Based Perspectives for Physical Therapists During COVID-19](#): Resources, including activities for preschool, elementary, and secondary age students.
- [American Occupational Therapy Association \(AOTA\) Telehealth Resources](#): Specific webpage about providing telehealth on the AOTA website.
- [American Physical Therapy Association \(APTA\) Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources for the Physical Therapy Profession](#): Specific webpage of resources on the APTA website for support during the COVID-19 pandemic.