



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

# Reopening: Guidance for **Gyms and Workout Facilities**

Guidance Document

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Gyms and workout facilities have been very challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these businesses have been viewed as “non-essential” by state governments and are closed. Many have been forced to lay off or furlough key staff members, which may complicate re-opening as states start to relax shelter-in-place and stay-at-home restrictions.

With such restrictions beginning to lift, gym owners are faced with difficult questions that should be addressed before reopening, such as:

- How can we protect our employees and gym members from COVID-19 while working out at our facility?
- How do we assure gym members that we are doing all we can to protect them from COVID-19?
- How can we minimize the risk of disease transmission if those who are ill or those who have had contact with positive COVID-19 are members of our gyms?
- What do we do if a member is sick or not following guidelines?

According to Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and other credible health resources, COVID-19 is not spread through perspiration (sweat) however, items touched by many people in a gym (e.g., barbells, weight machines, aerobic fitness equipment, etc.) could pose a risk for transmission of settled respiratory droplets.

Measures can be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 from person-to-person spread through respiratory droplets. The use of proper disinfectant and cleaning techniques, practicing social distancing, personal protective equipment, minimizing clients in the gym at one time, etc. can all be put in place to help minimize the potential for exposure and the spread of the virus.

This document offers practical guidance for gym owners to implement interim measures to reduce

the risk of transmitting COVID-19. It addresses the key questions above and provides tips for employees and gym members.

## What should an Employer do to protect themselves and their members?

Gym owners should continually monitor international (World Health Organization (WHO)), federal (CDC), state, and local guidelines for changes in recommendations, cleaning strategies, and other best management practices. Employers should also consider developing a team of professionals to monitor, assess, and implement new strategies as they become available. In addition, employers should consider the following strategies for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in regards to physical distancing, ventilation, enhanced cleaning practices, restrooms and showers, personal hygiene, employee wellness, personal protective equipment, training, waste and laundering, and communication. Due to the variety of gyms and workout facilities and sizes, it may not be possible for establishments to implement all of the following, however, trying to tackle the problem from multiple angles can help reduce health risks.

### Physical Distancing

- Limit the number of members in the gym at one time.
- Take into consideration physical distance guidelines for equipment layout and activities.
  - Consider distancing equipment at least 6 feet apart with greater distancing for treadmills and other aerobic fitness equipment where high exertion is common.
  - Aerobic fitness equipment can be arranged in a “X” pattern to provide greater distancing.
  - Physical barriers can also be helpful to create distancing or segregate exercise areas.



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- Consider developing online sign-up systems (i.e., first come first serve) with set-duration (one hour) workout periods.
- Consider creating specific hours for “reservation – only” admittance to limit access for older members.
- Train gym personnel on distancing guidelines and ways to communicate them to members.
- Use social media and other communication (signage/email/text lists) to educate members on the distancing guidelines and procedures.
- Utilize self-check-in or place barrier/partition between front desk staff and members.
- Mark distances using tape/markers/paint/signage of distancing for members.
  - Video, photos, and markings are ideal to demonstrate distancing measures.
- Consider offering planned circuit type workouts that facilitate distancing and allow for wiping/disinfection of equipment during recovery between exercises.
- Group exercise classes should only be offered if distancing requirements can be maintained and there is no person-to-person physical contact.
- Basketball courts and other areas where sports with physical contact occurs should be closed.
- Saunas and steam baths should be closed or limited to one guest or family unit at a time.
- Staff should monitor physical distancing requirements in large whirlpools or swimming pools in outdoor or well-ventilated spaces, and based on the size of the pool, limit the number of members.
- Personal trainers and staff assisting members with exercise should consider distancing.
  - Face masks should be worn if distancing is not possible.
- Water fountains should be closed, and patrons encouraged to bring their own water.
- Juice bars and other food service areas should follow guidelines for restaurants.
  - Guidance is available on [AIHA's BackToWork-Safely.org website](#).
- Increase the number of wipe stations through the facility.

### Ventilation

- Get fresh air into to the gym and properly utilize ventilation system. Some ways to do this or seek help:
  - Encourage outdoor activity and classes if feasible.
  - Open doors and windows if possible.
  - Maximize fresh air through ventilation system.
  - Maintain relative humidity at 40-60%.
  - Ensure restroom is under negative pressure.
  - If you don't know how, ask an HVAC professional and see [ASHRAE](#) updates for more information.
- Consider using portable HEPA filtration units.
- If fans, such as pedestal fans or hard mounted fans, are used in the gym, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one person directly at another individual. If fans are disabled or removed, employees and members should remain aware of, and take steps to prevent, [heat hazards](#).

### Enhanced Cleaning Practices

- Select appropriate disinfectants – consider effectiveness and safety.
  - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a [list of products](#) that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2.
  - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets and follow manufacturer specifications.
  - Consider consulting industrial hygiene experts if additional advice is needed.



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- Provide materials for members to wipe/disinfect equipment before and after exercise at each location/station/piece of equipment.
- If feasible consider providing “ready to clean” tags that members can access and place on equipment after use. Trained staff can then ensure equipment is disinfected in a timely manner.
- Establish a disinfection routine for staff at regular intervals.
  - Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time.
  - Contact surfaces should be disinfected frequently.
    - Promote these practices to members – make this visible.
  - Consider using a checklist or audit system to track how often cleaning is conducted.
- Due to current uncertainties surrounding the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, care should be taken when using a hand dryer or paper towel.
- The use of touch or push hand dryers is discouraged due to possible surface contamination. If hand dryers are used, consider touchless devices.
- Businesses and employers should work with HVAC professionals to ensure that bathrooms are well ventilated.
- Only allow shower and locker room use if there are partitions or else place signage to maintain proper physical distancing. If partitions or proper distancing are not possible, these facilities should remain closed.
  - Shoes should be worn in locker rooms/showers.
- Double efforts to keep bathrooms/showers/locker rooms clean and properly disinfected frequently.

### Restrooms/Showers/Locker Rooms

- Doors to multi-stall restrooms should be able to be opened and closed without touching handles if at all possible.
  - Place a trash can by the door if the door cannot be opened without touching the handle.
- For single restrooms, provide signage and materials (paper towels and trash cans) for individuals to use without touching the handles, and consider providing a key so disinfection measures can be better controlled.
- Place signs indicating that toilet lids (if present) should be closed before flushing.
- Place signs asking member and employees to wash hands before and after using the restroom.
- Provide paper towels and air dryers in restrooms.<sup>1</sup>
  - The WHO and CDC currently state that hands can be dried using a paper towel or hand dryer.

### Personal Hygiene

- Establish “before and after” workout and locker room hand washing or sanitizing for all members and staff.
- Provide hand washing stations at the front of the establishment or alternatively, hand sanitizer if not feasible.

### Employee Wellness

- Conduct employee temperature screening and wellness checks before each shift.
  - Temperature screening can include manual (use non-contact infrared thermometers) or thermal camera methods.
  - Employees can self-check temperature, while wearing a glove, or disinfect between use.
  - There are a number of examples available for wellness questionnaires (see [Resources](#)).

<sup>1</sup>NOTE VERSION CHANGE: In version 2 of this guidance document, in the section titled “Restrooms” it stated to disconnect or tape off the hand dryer.



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- If employee is sick or receives any kind of testing (virus or antibody), results should be reported to employer and timing/decision to go back to work should only be with doctor's approval and current CDC recommendations for stay at home and when to go back to work.
- Employers can consider incorporating a wellness questionnaire with questions such as:
  - Have you, or a person you have been in close contact with, been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days? (close contact is 6 feet or less for more than 10 minutes.)
  - Have you experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 72 hours (to include fever, shortness of breath, cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing)? Have you traveled internationally or another hot spot (e.g., New York) in the last 14 days?

### Other Control Measures

- Although not necessary if hand-washing protocols are rigorously followed, consider providing disposable gloves to staff.
  - If gloves are worn, they must be changed regularly and are not a substitution for hand-washing.
- Provide or encourage employees to wear face coverings depending on local requirements and for those who cannot maintain physical distancing as part of the job (**NOTE: Homemade face coverings primarily protect others not yourself**).
- Ensure that training is provided for all Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) worn and for all disinfectant products used.

**NOTE: If an employer chooses to provide an N95 respirator, please fully consider all the potential OSHA requirements.**

### Training

- Provide instruction and training to employees on how to:
  - Properly put on and remove gloves.
  - Clean and disinfect surfaces according to product specifications.
  - Correctly use face coverings and/or respirators. If employer chooses to provide an N95 respirator, consider all the potential OSHA requirements.

- Provide Safety Data Sheets for cleaning chemicals and ensure employees are aware of the hazards of use.
- If advice is needed, industrial hygienists have expertise in selecting PPE and training.

### Waste and Laundering

- Single-use items and used disinfection materials can be treated as regular waste, following regular safety guidelines.
- Towels should be washed and dried on the highest temperature settings allowable for the fabric. Disposable gloves and face coverings should be worn when staff handles dirty laundry.

### Communication

- It is strongly recommend that gyms require all patrons wear face masks while on the premises.
- Communicate to members what the fitness center is doing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
  - (e.g., disinfection routine, health policies for staff, and health & safety measures in place).
- Consider communicating to members when gym attendance may not be a good option (e.g. taking care of someone who is COVID-19 positive, exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, being in a high-risk category, etc.).
- Communicate that the fitness center has the right to refuse service to anyone exhibiting symptoms or not following guidelines (e.g., physical distancing).
- Platforms for communication could include social media, websites, and indoor/outdoor signage.



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## What should an **Employee do to protect themselves and the member?**

- Evaluate your health constantly, if you are sick stay home. If you have a temperature stay home. If someone at home is sick, stay home. If you have allergies and sneezing, stay home. **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPPA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**
- Wear face covering when out in public and maintain physical distancing.
- Wash your hands when you arrive at work, before/after eating and breaks, after touching your face or face covering and when you leave work.
- Wear a face covering or something better if you have it.
- Let your employer know if you have concerns about the PPE that may be provided to you and that you are properly instructed on how to use it.
- Carry a towel, if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth and mask, attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough, immediately leave the building, wash your hands and face thoroughly before going back to work.

## What a **Member can do to minimize the transmission of COVID-19**

- If you are sick stay home. If you have a temperature stay home. If someone in your house is sick, stay home. If you have allergies and can't control sneezing, stay home.
- Use online gym/workout services where you can.

- Pre-plan your workout routine to avoid lingering/socializing to allow other members to workout due to reduced occupancy/distancing.
- Limit the items you touch within the gym to only the items you will use.
- Avoid lifting gloves and other items that are not easily cleaned.
- As you enter and leave the building, wear a face covering or something better if you have it.
- Even if the gym does not require all patrons wear face masks while on the premises and during your workout, it is recommended to wear one.
- Wipe down each piece of equipment you use before and after use and dispose of the wipe appropriately.
- Wash your hands before and after you leave the building if possible. If not, use hand sanitizer when you enter and before you leave the building.
- Remember social distancing requirements in locker rooms.
- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other members and employees when walking throughout the gym to the extent possible.
- If you get the urge to sneeze or cough, put on your mask, cover your nose, mouth, and mask with a napkin or handkerchief, attempt to delay the urge to sneeze or cough, immediately leave the building, wash your hands and face thoroughly before returning.



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## Resources

- **Association of Fitness Studios:** <https://member.afsfitness.com/content/crisis-management-resources>.
  - [Tips for Employers](#) (courtesy US Chamber of Commerce Foundation/CDC)
  - [Tips for Members](#)
- **IDEA: Health & Fitness Association:** <https://www.ideafit.com/covid19-updates/>
- Numerous **wellness questionnaire examples** are available online (e.g., [https://doh.sd.gov/documents/COVID19/BusinessScreening\\_Q&A.pdf](https://doh.sd.gov/documents/COVID19/BusinessScreening_Q&A.pdf))
- The EPA has developed a list of disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- AIHA's Indoor Environmental Quality Committee developed these guidance documents about re-opening and cleaning buildings after closures due to COVID-19: [Recovering from COVID-19 Building Closures](#) and [Workplace Cleaning for COVID-19](#).
- American Cleaning Institute's COVID-19 Resources <https://www.cleaninginstitute.org/coronavirus>

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Occupational health and safety (OHS) professionals (also known as industrial hygienists) practice

the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating, and controlling workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Through a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting, OHS professionals make sure workplaces are healthy and safe.

## Get additional resources at AIHA's [Coronavirus Outbreak Resource Center](#).

Find a qualified industrial hygiene and OEHS professionals near you in our [Consultants Listing](#).



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