

COVID-19 Reopening Considerations for Gyms and Fitness Centers

While the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many organizations to close their doors for an extended period, several states across the country have officially begun implementing reopening measures, allowing some employers to resume operations. However, as organizations prepare to open their doors once again, there are numerous factors to consider in order to preserve the health and safety of both employees and customers.

Specifically, gym and fitness center owners face unique challenges in minimizing the risks of reopening. After all, the nature of these organizations can make it difficult to maintain social distancing measures and keep high-touch surfaces clean—both of which contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

Review the following guidance to help keep your employees and members safe as you resume operations and ensure a successful facility reopening. Keep in mind that this guidance is general—depending on the location of your facility, you may need to account for additional state and local requirements or restrictions.

Employee Health and Safety

Before you can allow members to enter your facility, it's crucial to implement workplace adjustments and procedures to ensure the health and safety of your staff. Consider these measures:

- Utilize routine meetings and emails to communicate with staff about the steps being taken to prevent COVID-19 exposure at your facility.
- Provide an adequate supply of paper towels, soap and hand sanitizer to allow staff to maintain proper hand hygiene.
- Offer tissues to ensure employees follow proper cough and sneeze etiquette, as well as no-touch trash bins for tissue disposal.
- Educate employees on the common symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough and shortness of breath). Tell them to stay home from work if they have any symptoms.
- Conduct a wellness check on employees each day to ensure they are healthy and safe to enter the facility. If employees answer “yes” to either of the following questions, send them home:
 - Have you or any person you've been in close contact with (e.g., family members) been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
 - Have you experienced any cold- or flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, stuffy or runny nose, vomiting or diarrhea) in the past 72 hours?
- Provide employees with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for their specific job tasks (e.g., personal training, cleaning the facility or checking members in). Require all employees to wear masks or face coverings at all times.
- Require employees to wash their hands after entering the facility, working with a member,

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touching their mask or face covering, using the restroom and leaving the facility.

- Encourage staff to carry a towel with them at all times. Instruct them to use the towel to cover their nose and mouth if they get a sudden urge to sneeze or cough. After using the towel, require staff to wash their hands and face before returning to work.
- Train employees on the following topics:
 - How to safely put on, use, remove and store PPE
 - How to maintain proper hand hygiene and follow sneeze and cough etiquette
 - How to maintain social distancing guidelines
 - How to clean and disinfect surfaces properly
 - How to enforce health and safety requirements with members
 - How to recognize areas or practices that increase the risk of COVID-19 exposure, as well as how to report these concerns
- Implement proper signage throughout the facility to remind staff of proper health and safety practices.
- Establish a process for reviewing employees' workplace health and safety concerns related to COVID-19 exposure and determining mitigation methods in a timely manner.

Cleaning and Disinfection Practices

Because your facility possesses a wide range of equipment and surfaces that both members and employees touch frequently, utilizing proper cleaning and disinfection measures is vital. Although health experts have found that COVID-19 cannot be spread through sweat, it can be spread through respiratory droplets—which can easily settle on equipment and surfaces throughout your facility. Use these cleaning and disinfection best practices:

- Maintain a stocked supply of cleaning and disinfection products. Be sure to purchase products

that meet Environmental Protection Agency criteria for use against COVID-19. Further, review all product labels, safety data sheets and manufacturer specifications to ensure proper storage and use.

- Designate specific staff members to be responsible for maintaining proper cleaning and disinfection practices.
- Keep in mind that if surfaces or equipment are dirty, they should be cleaned with soap and water or detergent prior to disinfection.
- Utilize a well-documented system to track how often cleaning and disinfection take place. Increase cleaning and disinfection frequency for the entire facility, paying special attention to high-risk areas—including equipment, restrooms, showers and locker rooms.
- Consider the following changes to restrooms, showers and locker rooms:
 - Only allow these areas to be open if social distancing and proper sanitation can be enforced. If this is not possible, these areas should remain closed.
 - Allow for doors to multi-stall restrooms to be opened and closed without touching handles, if feasible. This could entail adding a foot pull or encouraging occupants to touch the door handle with a paper towel.
 - In single-occupancy restrooms, use proper signage and materials (e.g., paper towels and trash cans) to encourage occupants to not touch handles. Restrict access to single-occupancy restrooms with a key to allow staff to monitor its use and disinfect it regularly.
 - Use signage to encourage occupants to close toilet lids before flushing and wash their hands before and after using the restroom.
 - Provide paper towels for drying hands and

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- adequate trash bins. Prohibit the use of air dryers.
- Require occupants to wear shoes in the locker room at all times. This includes wearing water shoes in shower areas.
- Install numerous hand-washing (or hand-sanitizing, if hand-washing is not possible) stations throughout your facility. Specifically, make sure you have these stations located at the entrance and exit of the facility and at the entrance and exit of the locker rooms. Implement signage encouraging employees and members to use these stations frequently.
- If you don't already, be sure to provide numerous wipe stations throughout your facility for members to disinfect equipment after use. Implement signage to encourage members to do so.
 - In the event that members forget or neglect to wipe equipment after use, designate employees who are responsible for identifying and disinfecting this equipment before another member uses it.
- Prevent staff from sharing any workplace tools or equipment, such as phones, keyboards and cash registers. If employees must share any tools or equipment, establish proper cleaning and disinfecting procedures before and after each use.
- Ensure proper air ventilation throughout the facility. Be sure to clean HVAC systems regularly.
- Have employees place their towels and work clothing in a sealed plastic bag after each use, as if the materials are contaminated. Have these materials laundered by washing and drying on the highest temperature setting possible for the fabric. Ensure staff wear masks or face coverings when handling dirty laundry. If your facility does not provide laundry services, provide employees with instructions for safely washing and drying their materials at home.

- Use disposable rather than reusable items when possible. Ensure adequate trash bins and bolster trash removal practices to accommodate extra waste.

Member Health and Safety

There are several factors that you must consider in order to promote proper health and safety standards for your members. First, it's important to reduce equipment, activity and transmission risks. Follow these tips:

- Consider conducting a wellness check on members, similar to that of your employees, to ensure they are healthy and safe to enter the facility. If members answer "yes" to either of the following questions, do not let them enter the facility:
 - Have you or any person you've been in close contact with (e.g., family members) been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
 - Have you experienced any cold- or flu-like symptoms (e.g., fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache, stuffy or runny nose, vomiting or diarrhea) in the past 72 hours?
- Limit the number of members in the facility at any given time. Only allow members who are actually exercising (as opposed to just socializing) inside the facility. In addition, consider offering special hours for vulnerable members only (e.g., older adults).
- Consider implementing an online sign-up system for members to reserve set-duration workout periods and limit their time in the facility.
- Utilize contactless payment, check-in and check-out procedures. Discourage the use of cash, credit cards and reward cards. If contactless procedures are not feasible, place a barrier or partition between members and staff.
- Remove any unnecessary touchpoints (especially those that cannot be cleaned or disinfected).

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- Use floor markings and signage to enforce social distancing guidelines.
- Try to space exercise equipment at least 6 feet apart, with even greater distancing for high-exertion cardio machines. If this is not possible, consider having members use every other machine.
- Implement physical barriers, if possible, to further separate equipment.
- Prohibit the use of water fountains. Encourage members to bring their own water.
- Consider offering workout plans for members that promote social distancing and disinfection practices.
- Close or restrict areas and activities where physical contact could occur or social distancing isn't feasible. This includes basketball courts, swimming pools, saunas, hot tubs and group exercise classes.
- Utilize an isolated area for delivery companies to drop off materials quickly and minimize their time in the facility.
- Wear a mask or face covering at all times within the facility.
- Avoid using lifting gloves or any other personal items that are difficult to clean while in the facility.
- Wash or sanitize your hands before and after leaving the facility.
- If you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue. Wash your face and hands before touching any equipment or returning to your activity.
- Keep in mind that the facility has the right to refuse service to anyone that has COVID-19 symptoms or fails to follow facility guidelines.

Additional Considerations

Lastly, be sure to review your facility's operations and make any additional adjustments necessary to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and keep your staff and members safe. Follow these measures:

Apart from these practices, it's also crucial to communicate with members via your website, email, social media and facility signage about the steps your organization is taking to protect them and the steps that they need to take on their part. Include the following information for members in your communications:

- Keep any areas that are unable to follow social distancing or proper sanitation guidelines closed.
 - Maintain adequate records of all members—including names, contact information and visit dates—to be able to assist if contact tracing is needed. Do the same for employee records and work schedules.
 - Ensure that all of your operations and reopening plans are compliant with federal, state and local guidelines, as well as industry best practices. Consider designating one or multiple employees to be responsible for ensuring compliance.
- By following these precautions, your organization can reap the benefits of providing fitness services to your community once again, while also keeping employees and members as healthy and safe as possible.
- For additional reopening resources and the latest COVID-19 developments, contact us today.