

**INTERIM
GUIDANCE
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KEY CONSIDERATIONS

for Sports, Fitness, Aquatics & Ancillary Facilities/Clubs in the Context of COVID-19

BACKGROUND

This key considerations document has been produced by a specially convened working group instigated and led by IHRSA with WFSGI, Europe Active along with experts in a number of related fields. This document provides general advice on the key considerations on the health safety aspects of the operations of sports, fitness, aquatics, thermal facilities/clubs in the context of COVID-19. This document together with the accompanying COVID-19 Risk Assessment Tool and Mitigation Checklist has been developed to provide support to club/facility operators in helping to assess the specific additional risks, identifying mitigation measures, and making an informed evidence-based decision on reopening facilities. These documents will be reviewed and updated by the working group as the pandemic evolves. National and local legislation and guidelines on COVID-19 public health and social measures must always take precedence over any other guidance.

Worldwide about 23% of men and 32% of women do not meet physical activity guidelines (Guthold et al., 2018). Regular physical activity supports both physical and mental health in adults, teens, and children. Physical activity is especially important amid the COVID-19 pandemic given its role in helping to strengthen and improve immune functioning and lower risk of viral illness (Nieman, Wentz 2019), and its effect in the prevention and management of cardiovascular and metabolic health conditions as well as some cancers (WHO GAPP 2018 (3)), which can increase risk of severe adverse COVID-19 outcomes. Additionally, as many people have been at home and isolated for long periods, the mental health (Chekroud et al 2018) and social benefits of community physical activity cannot be ignored.

KEY ISSUES AND MITIGATION OPTIONS

The key factors for consideration for the most common types of facility or area within a club/facility are included in the accompanying [Risk Assessment Tool and Mitigation Checklist](#). These key factors address the specific issues that should be taken into consideration when planning reopening of a facility and individual areas. The table below provides an overview of and background information on some of these additional factors, including mitigation measures that will also be captured during the risk assessment process.

ARE THERE AREAS WITHIN A FACILITY THAT COULD BE CONSIDERED A LOWER OR HIGHER RISK?

COMMENTS

Lower risk sports/activities where physical distancing is possible, e.g. swimming, gym, exercise classes, sports hall activities such as archery. These will be less of a risk if physical distancing advice for staff, instructors and participants are followed.

Higher risk sports include sports and fitness activities that involve any direct physical contact. Physical and close contacts among participants increases risk of transmission of COVID-19.

RISK FACTORS AND MITIGATION CHECKLIST

See details in the [Risk Assessment Tool and Mitigation Checklist](#)

Consider:

- daily health screening checks of facility users and staff
- physical distancing (at least 1 meter) of staff, instructors, and participants. This distance will vary depending on the activity and area. Check individual areas for minimum distances.
- physical separation through protection screens (e.g. reception areas, gym)
- thorough disinfection and cleaning of areas, gym equipment, after/between classes, etc.
- sharing of equipment should be prohibited
- consider safe utilization of the closed containers for all disposable and reusable hygiene materials (e.g. tissue, towels, etc.).

SIZE OF FACILITY AND ACTIVITY

COMMENTS

The size of the facility and activity taking place affects the risk.

Physical distancing of participants must be maintained during the activity. Other factors must also be considered across the different activities:

- number of participants
- number of instructors/trainers/lifeguards/other staff
- presence (if any) of spectators or limit numbers (e.g. sports hall/swimming pool)
- reduction/re-arrangement of equipment in cardio, strength, and free weights training areas in the gym
- marking out of floor areas in exercise studios
- taking account of arrival and departure to assess maximum numbers
- specific times for different vulnerable groups
- using ropes/wave breakers to mark out and control numbers in swimming pool/aquatic areas
- use of personal protective screens e.g. between cardiovascular equipment

RISK FACTORS AND MITIGATION CHECKLIST

See details in the [Risk Assessment Tool and Mitigation Checklist](#)

Conducting classes and activities with designated marked out areas maintaining at least 1-meter physical distancing, booking/registration system for contact tracing, temperature monitoring at entrances, and provision of visual reminders such as stickers or wrist stamps may reduce the possibility of incidental contact.

This may be more challenging in facilities with casual usage/guests, for example in large swimming/leisure pool complexes. This may require the use of numbered wristbands (as some pools already use during busy sessions) or other control/identification measures.

INDOOR OR OUTDOOR AREAS

COMMENTS

Facilities with outdoor facilities such as pools, artificial pitches, golf etc., will be better ventilated than indoor areas.

It may be easier to ensure physical distancing advice is followed in outdoor areas.

RISK FACTORS AND MITIGATION CHECKLIST

See details in the [Risk Assessment Tool and Mitigation Checklist](#)

WHO advice on minimum physical distancing must be maintained during all activities.

DEMOGRAPHICS (AGE AND HEALTH)

COMMENTS

Whilst regular members/customers will tend to be more physically active and have better immune systems, any underlying conditions need to be identified.

The age and health of members/customers and other staff will vary.

Consider advising some at-risk groups not to attend. Consider virtual resources for these groups until risk is further mitigated.

RISK FACTORS AND MITIGATION CHECKLIST

See details in the [Risk Assessment Tool and Mitigation Checklist](#)

Pre arrival at the facility, health checks are highly encouraged to ensure exclusion of those with potential additional risks (comorbidities, medications, allergies).

Identify additional actions that need to be taken to enable customers/members and staff with underlying conditions to interact safely with the environment in line with national and WHO guidance. Virtual resources could be provided until risk is further mitigated.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

RISK COMMUNICATION

COMMENTS

Ensure public health advice is available to all members, users, staff, and personnel of all relevant stakeholders (e.g. external group hires of areas of the facility/club).

Each club/facility also is recommended to appoint a COVID-19 liaison/official who is responsible for keeping the club and customers up to date on local, national, and WHO guidance (ensure any local/national regulations on this are followed for workplace and/or sports/fitness facilities).

RISK FACTORS AND MITIGATION CHECKLIST

See details in the [Risk Assessment Tool and Mitigation Checklist](#) and the operator recommendations below.

Display signs to inform members/customers and staff about best practices to prevent transmission of COVID-19 (physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette etc.) and help lines.

CONTACT TRACING

COMMENTS

Ensure all present in the club/facility have been registered including members, customers, staff and other visitors (e.g. contractors).

RISK FACTORS AND MITIGATION CHECKLIST

Adapting existing or implementing new computerised systems to record all arrivals at the facility.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO FACILITY/CLUB OPERATORS

These mitigation measures may help enable national/local governments to allow clubs/facilities to reopen as with the key consideration measures put into action, a very controlled safe environment can be achieved in a comprehensive way.

Consider the opportunity of using club/facility ambassadors to promote messaging on best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is everyone's responsibility to keep themselves and others healthy and contribute to successful physical activities helping to build immune systems.

PRE-ACTIVITY AND DURING ACTIVITY

Ensure availability to handwashing, alcohol-based hand gel stations, and hygiene facilities at multiple locations in the facility.

Ensure good hygiene signage across all common areas, changing rooms, activity facilities, etc.

Provide first aid and emergency response procedures in the case of suspected individuals with COVID-19 in the facility.

Temperature screening: Staff should check their own and customers'/members' temperatures on arrival. Any temperatures above 38°C should be reported to the manager on duty, who should be given the authority to refuse entry.

Ensure capacity to isolate suspected cases:

- staff
- customers/members

Develop and make available risk communication on:

- clinical features of COVID-19 and preventive measures, especially physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, and hand-hygiene practices
- the criteria for asking individuals with respiratory symptoms to leave the facility
- information on physical distancing
- information on the use of face coverings and medical masks based on national/local health authority guidelines

Recommend that any towels used are for single use only.

Determine:

- how a suspected COVID-19 patient will be [cared for and isolated](#) pending arrival of medical services.
- where a contact of a COVID-19 patient will be [physically separated](#) pending arrival of medical services.
- how customers/members and staff will be notified of a case of a person in the facility being confirmed with COVID-19.

Provide:

- additional staff training in all COVID-19 facility operating protocols, personal safety, and the reduction of the risk of exposure to self and others at home/traveling to and from work/in the workplace.
- additional staff training to ensure effective communication of key messages at all levels of the organization and to members/clients. Ensure staff are confident in dealing with possible conflicts arising between members and/or a member and an employee who is concerned about someone's conduct and non-observance of prevailing usage requirements.

Ensure:

- availability of rubber gloves to any staff handling laundry, towels, cleaning etc.
- staff education and training in COVID-19 emergency procedural operations, including use of AED/ CPR and basic first aid with members/clients in compliance with best practice.
- cleaning procedures include disinfection of frequently touched surfaces including door handles, toilet handles, bathroom faucet handles, gym, sports equipment etc. in all areas several times per day. All agents used for cleaning and/or disinfection will be approved by management and recommended by the WHO, or national/state/local health department and registered as appropriate with the national/state/local regulatory agencies.

Review staffing requirements and shift schedules in line with risk assessment and mitigating factors. Consider dividing staff into at least two independent teams. In the event of a COVID-19 case which requires isolation, another team will be able to maintain operations.

MINIMIZING RISK OF SPREAD THROUGH MITIGATION MEASURES

GYM

Where possible, facilities should implement measures to improve ventilation and air quality using specific filtering systems. Whilst higher ventilation air may be desirable (where existing systems allow), care should be taken not to encourage a virus on microscopic water droplets to move any further than necessary.

- Reduction/re-arrangement of equipment in cardio, strength, and free weights training areas in the gym to ensure physical distancing is maintained
- Use of protective screens wherever practical which could allow more equipment to be retained in use

EXERCISE STUDIOS

- Marking out of floor areas in exercise studios
- control/booking system to allow for physical distancing to be maintained on arrival and departure to the class
- A higher level of physical distancing will be required for classes entailing more vigorous activity due to the higher risk of COVID-19 transmission from high intensity classes

SWIMMING POOL

- To control numbers may require the use of numbered and timed wrist bands (color coded, as some pools already use during busy sessions) and using lifeguards or other staff to control the flow of members/customers and ensure people do not congregate inside the pool area
- Create visible markers on the pool deck and entrances to indicate required physical distancing
- Using ropes/wave breakers to mark out swimming pool/aquatic areas
- Close water features such as waves and play equipment where control of physical distancing is not possible
- implement and mark out queue system for water slides
- Consider how to maintain physical spacing in the pool while customers are swimming e.g. using lanes and limiting numbers per lane, use of lifeguards and/or visible markers for swimmer
- Consider controlling and clearly marking where swimmers can enter and exit the pool e.g. at the steps and/or ladders only
- Personal equipment e.g. swim boards/fins or inflatables. Consider whether these be allowed or not in the first instance or only those provided by the facility and they must be sanitized before and after use.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Only one parent or carer per child will be allowed to supervise their child during swimming (outside of the pool) and they must maintain social distancing guidelines on the pool deck
- For other water based activities e.g. diving, water polo, and synchronized swimming all, local and national guidelines from government and national aquatic federations should be followed.

LOCKER ROOMS AND SHOWERS

- Every other locker (in a staggered arrangement with the lockers opposite) is kept locked, and access is barred to every other shower and, possibly, urinal.
- The numbers of people inside the changing rooms should also be limited and access/flow of customers monitored to ensure physical distancing and there should be no unnecessary delays in the changing room.

SPORTS HALLS/AREAS

Each sport will need to be risk assessed and advice from the recognised sports governing bodies sought on the most effective ways of maintaining physical distancing and mitigating risks. Some example documents are in the Useful References section.

OUTDOOR SPORTS/FITNESS ACTIVITIES

Fitness activities must follow the same principles as indoor exercise classes but physical distancing and arrival/departure may be easier to implement and maintain if more space and arrival/departure points available.

Each sport will need to be risk assessed and advice from recognized sports governing bodies sought on the most effective ways of maintaining physical distance and mitigating risks.

SAUNA/STEAM/THERMAL AREAS

In sauna cabins, a minimum distance of 1.5 meters between the individual seats is required – this must be marked accordingly.

There shall be no infusions with swirls in the sauna cabins. Steam rooms will remain closed during the first phase of reopening.

CATERING FACILITIES

These areas must follow guidance from national/local health authorities in addition to relevant restaurants/bars/ trade associations.

SPA AND BEAUTY TREATMENT SERVICES

These areas must follow guidance from national/local health authorities in addition to relevant trade associations e.g. ISPA.

CHILD CARE FACILITIES

Creche and other child care facilities must follow guidance from national/local health authorities in addition to relevant trade/professional associations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CUSTOMERS/MEMBERS/STAFF

PRE-ARRIVAL TO THE FACILITY - SCREENING

All customers, members and staff should proactively and regularly check their health status (including taking their temperature, and monitoring for any respiratory symptoms).

Staff, members, and customers who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 14 days/is feeling unwell should not come to the facility and be advised on the designated contact online or by telephone.

All staff should be briefed on the clinical signs of COVID-19, operational protocols for a suspected/confirmed, COVID-19 case in the facility, on infection prevention and control measures (IPC), use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and on where to find more information.



MINIMIZING RISK OF SPREAD THROUGH MITIGATION MEASURES

Wash hands often with [soap and water](#) for at least 20 seconds. Use an [alcohol-based hand sanitizer](#) if soap and water are not available. Hand sanitizer stations should be available throughout the facility.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing. Practice respiratory etiquette (maintain distance: minimum 1 meter), cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or flexed elbow, wash hands). If coughing persists, isolate and seek medical advice.

Avoid:

- close contact with those suffering from acute respiratory infections.
- contact with anyone if you feel unwell or ill.
- shaking hands or hugging.

Customers/members/staff should not share towels, clothing, bar soap or other personal items. Gloves should be worn by staff handling towels or laundry in the team environment.

Staff should wear masks where risks are higher, e.g. cleaning staff or where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Advise staff, members, and customers not to touch their own mouths or nose.

Be aware of [regular cleaning of frequently touched items](#) (door handles, elevators, gym equipment, vending machines, water fountains, etc.)

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In addition, consultation took place with ICREPS (International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals) and EREPS (European Register of Exercise Professionals).

USEFUL REFERENCES & DOCUMENTS

REFERENCES:

WHO Physical Activity

1. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/be-active-during-covid-19>
2. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-technical-guidance/stay-physically-active-during-self-quarantine>
3. Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA): <https://www.who.int/ncds/prevention/physical-activity/global-action-plan-2018-2030/en/>
4. WHO return to work guidance: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/guidance-for-schools-workplaces-institutions>
5. Considerations for Sports Federations and Sports Event Organizers. World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/considerations-for-sports-federations-sports-event-organizers-when-planning-mass-gatherings-in-the-context-of-covid-19-interim-guidance>

DOCUMENTS:

1. Water Sanitation Hygiene and Waste Management for Covid-19. World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/water-sanitation-hygiene-and-waste-management-for-covid-19>
2. 18 Safety Considerations for health club reopening. IHRSA: <https://www.ihrsa.org/improve-your-club/safety-considerations-for-your-health-club-reopening-plan/>
3. Swimming Pool, Hot Tub, Sauna safety during COVID-19. IHRSA: <https://www.ihrsa.org/improve-your-club/pool-hot-tub-sauna-safety-during-covid-19/>
4. IHRSA four pronged framework: <https://hub.ihrsa.org/hubfs/Advocacy/Letter%20PDFs/IHRSA%20Framework%20on%20Reopening.pdf>
5. Europe Active COVID- 19 guidance:
 - <https://www.europeactive.eu/covid19>
 - https://www.europeactive.eu/sites/europeactive.eu/files/covid19/Operating_Practices_May2020.pdf
6. IAKS Germany Recommendations on reopening Public Swimming pools: <https://iaks.sport/news/iaks-germany-phased-re-opening-municipal-swimming-pools>
7. Examples of Framework/Guidance documents at National Level from IHRSA's Federation partners include [Czech Fitness Association](#), [Exercise New Zealand](#), [ACAD Brazil](#)

WEBSITES OF THE ASSOCIATIONS FOR CONTACTS MORE INFORMATION:

IHRSA | www.ihrsa.org

WFSGI | www.wfsgi.org

Europe Active | www.europeactive.org

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