

COVID-19 Transitioning – Obligatory Conditions and Guidelines for Gymnasiums and Fitness Centres

Mandatory Conditions for Gymnasiums and Fitness Centres

These following obligatory conditions are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta and require strict adherence. Failure to adhere to these conditions will result in enforcement procedures as provided by the Act.

As COVID-19 restrictions are gradually relaxed, employers and workers must work together to adapt and promote safe work practices consistent with advice from public health authorities and to ensure that premises are ready for the social distancing and correct hygiene measures that are critical to the success of the transition. Employers and workers must prevent the transmission of COVID-19 while at work, consistent with updated advice from the public health authorities.

Employers, workers and clients must prepare for the possibility that there could be cases of COVID-19 at gymnasiums and fitness centres and be ready to respond immediately, appropriately, effectively and efficiently, and consistent with specific recommendations from public health authorities.

Mandatory Conditions to be observed in Gymnasiums and Fitness Centres

The Superintendent of Public Health hereby orders that all gymnasiums and fitness centres shall implement the following measures:

(a) exercise the right of refusal of entry into the gym/fitness centre of clients if they have a temperature over 37.2C, are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms;

(b) ensure that maximum capacity of clients and staff that the gym/fitness centre can hold at any one time is 1 person per 6 square metres, and must not exceed a total of 75 persons. Allow only (1) client and one (1) member of staff in a gym/fitness centre with at total area less than 6 square metres.

(c) ensure that inside the gym/fitness centre every person keeps a minimum of 3 metres from others. Where the machines cannot be separated by 3 metres, alternate machines need to be cordoned off to ensure a minimum 3 metre separation between clients. Alternatively, acrylic screens or tempered glass barriers of at least 2 metre height may be erected between the machines to separate the clients.

(d) affix visible signage at the entrance of the gym/fitness centre indicating the maximum capacity that the facility can hold at any one time;

(e) indicate with visible markings outside and inside the gym two (2) metre distances that clients shall respect whilst queuing or waiting to enter;

(f) provide an appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub at the entrance of the facility and ensure that all persons sanitise their hands prior to entrance;

(g) acrylic screens or tempered glass barriers must be fitted in reception areas (2 metres high from the floor); (If this not manned then this is not required)

(h) ensure that all gym equipment, changing rooms, toilets and showers are cleaned and disinfected by staff every hour

(i) ensure that clients and staff always wear a face mask or face visor whilst inside gym/fitness centre when not exercising;

(j) Provide appropriate 70% alcohol cleaning wipes, or 70% alcohol spray and disposable paper towels for use by clients for the cleaning of equipment and mats

(k) group sessions must not exceed 8 persons + fitness instructor, and physical distancing of 3m must still be maintained

(l) personal trainers doing one-on-one training must have no direct contact with their clients and practice social distancing of 3m at all times.

(m) water dispensers are prohibited. All staff and clients should be encouraged to bring their own water

(n) All clients must bring their own personal towel(s)

(o) keep a list and contact details (name and contact number) of all people accessing the gym premises for 28 days (including trainers, clients, suppliers, maintenance, cleaners).

Guidelines for the application of COVID-19 mitigation measures in gymnasiums and fitness centres

Overview

This document aims to provide guidance to operators, employers and administration at gymnasiums, fitness and other indoor recreational facilities including yoga and dance studios, and recreation centres, as well as users, on mitigating factors and precautions which should be taken in order to restart activity in these facilities.

These guidances have been developed in accordance with current available evidence and is subject to review in case of superseding evidence or changes in mandatory conditions imposed by legislation. This guidance has been developed in accordance with feedback from the stakeholders and provides the general direction for operation of these facilities. It provides the minimum required conditions in order to reopen however the impact will be greater and more sustainable if the operators decide to implement safety measures which are more stringent than those recommended. In this way, the health and safety of both clients and staff is more likely to be maintained.

Understanding how COVID-19 spreads & the effect of and on exercise

Current research suggests that the SARS-CoV-2 virus (the virus that causes COVID-19) is transmitted from person to person:

- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks loudly.
- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 2 metres).

The virus which causes COVID-19 disease can be spread through droplets from a sick person or on contact (by touch). COVID-19 disease often presents with coughing or sneezing which release droplets of infected fluid. Cases may present with other symptoms or none at all. Most of these droplets can fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as desks, tables, machinery, equipment, floors, walls, clothes or telephones. Other frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, intercoms, lift buttons are other surfaces which are frequently touched by clients and employees can become contaminated. People can catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects –and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Being within two metres of a person with COVID-19, one has a higher risk of catching the disease by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to flu. Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

The risk of person-to-person transmission is increased the closer one comes to other people, the amount of time spent near them, and the number of people one comes near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.

The risk of surface transmission is increased when many people contact the same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

The pattern of breathing during strenuous exercise changes such that there is an increase in both the volumes of air that is breathed in and out, and of the number of breaths taken per

unit time. As the rate of breathing increases, the potential of spraying out infected droplets from someone who unknowingly has COVID-19 is higher than under normal circumstances.

Research also suggests that due to strenuous exercise, as one breathes deeper, when exposed to virus particles would be more likely to inhale such particles and direct them to the lower areas of the lung. Thus measures to minimise the risk of COVID spread must also take this into account.

Gym/Fitness Centre Administration – General Guidelines

- Limiting the number of persons is important to help ensure social distancing is maintained. This is calculated as 1 person per 6 square metres, including staff.
- reconfiguration of accessible areas, and availability of equipment should be reconsidered as appropriate.
- A booking system should be used with set duration workout periods.
- Clients/users should be requested not to arrive more than 5 minutes before their appointment and appointment times should be coordinated to avoid crowding.
- All clients/users booking appointments must complete a health declaration before each visit, confirming they have not been experiencing symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 or come into contact with anyone who has.
- Inform clients booking an appointment of policies restricting people exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. Clients should be advised that they must cancel an appointment if they develop symptoms after making an appointment.
- Cancellation policies should allow for customers to cancel or reschedule appointments without penalty should they develop symptoms.
- Bookings for workouts should not exceed 1 hour. Longer duration workouts and stays at the gym/fitness centre should be strongly discouraged – exposure is limited by shortening ones stay.
- To ensure strict hygienic measures, clear instructions summarising all protocols must be placed prominently in the fitness centre and communicated through its marketing, online and social media channels.
- Contactless payment should be encouraged.
- Ensure that employees who are sick must stay home.
- Ensure hand hygiene policies include the requirement for workers to wash hands after handling cash, passes, membership cards, and other shared items.

Reception area

- Reception areas that are manned by a receptionist must have acrylic screen or tempered glass barriers fitted (2 metres height from the floor)
- At the entrance appropriate signage should be available to inform clients on the maximum number of persons who may be at the facilities at any one time using the

square metre rule. This is the safe occupancy limit of the facility and must be respected, only allowing as many people as can safely be in the gym/fitness centre.

- Appropriate signage should inform customers not to enter the facility if they are exhibiting symptoms.
- Temperature checks on persons is recommended to be carried out at the entry to the gym/fitness centre, and entry refused to any individual either displaying or complaining of symptoms, not wearing a facemask on entry, or having a temperature of over 37.2C.
- Queue management - 2m spacing markings on the floor and if necessary outside the entrance.
- All staff and clients/users who are not exercising must wear a mask. Facemasks are to be removed for exercise.
- Provide adequate handwashing or hand sanitizer stations for customers and staff to use upon entering the facility and when leaving.
- Appropriate signage should demonstrate that each person must maintain a physical distance from others at all times. Such distance must be of at least 2 metres in the reception area, and of at least 3 metres where physical activity takes place.
- As much as possible doors should be left propped open so people can pass through without touching handles.
- Unnecessary communal items such as candy, magazines, and complimentary phone chargers should be removed.
- Consider managing where and how people travel through the facility where possible, including designating doorways for entrance and exit, and using one-way staircases or walkways if available. Signage should indicate these rules.
- All signage should be placed in locations where they are visible, draw attention, and are readable.
- Allocate special waste bins for potentially toxic waste – facemasks.
- Ensure that the reception area is configured so that people can maintain physical distancing. Waiting is prohibited.

Equipment and workout area

- In the area where physical activity takes place each person must maintain a physical distance of 3 metres from others at all times.
- Hand disinfection is mandatory before and after exercise. Instruct users to wash their hands before and after a workout and to use hand sanitizer when transitioning between pieces of equipment. Supplies for this must be provided throughout the facility.
- Policies must require clients to wipe down equipment before and after every use. Adequate supplies and garbage bins for disposing used materials are to be supplied for this purpose.

- Clients should be recommended to clean any equipment (including mats) prior to use, and supplies of 70% alcohol cleaning wipes, or 70% alcohol spray and disposable paper towels should be made available.
- Equipment surfaces to air dry naturally before using.
- Ensure used tissues, disinfectant wipes, and safety equipment are properly disposed of in a lined waste bin that is emptied at least daily.
- Designate areas for the use of the equipment and for moving around the area to ensure physical distances are maintained. Consider using tape on the floor to define these areas.
- Consider keeping all non-stationary equipment in one area to facilitate cleaning and disinfecting in between uses. Some examples of non-stationary equipment include balls, blocks, mats, resistance bands, paralletes, skipping ropes, wobble boards, and foam rollers. Station an employee nearby to wipe down equipment after each use before being put back into circulation.
- All equipment is to be included in the facility's regular scheduled cleaning and disinfecting plan, at least twice daily.
- **Masks should not be used while exercising.**
- Clients should be encouraged to wash their sports gloves after every training session.

Fitness room (also applicable to dance studios)

- Group classes should only be offered if physical distancing measures can be maintained.
- Consider holding outdoor classes to ensure the 3 metre physical distancing requirement is maintained.
- Use of fitness rooms must abide by Obligatory Conditions and Guidelines issued for the return to Sports in Malta. Maximum capacity must be in-line with both the Sports conditions and these conditions for Gymnasiums and Fitness centres, must respect the square metre rule and must not exceed 75 persons. Fitness rooms which can hold more than 8 persons according to the square metre rule, may only be used by groups of more than 8 persons if there are floor markings delineating areas of 64 square metres, each to be used by a group of up to 8 persons. These groups of persons cannot mix among themselves and should enter and exit the premises in separate groups. Use of changing rooms and showers in such instances are not allowed.
- Hand disinfection is mandatory before and after exercise. Instruct clients to wash their hands before and after a workout
- High-intensity classes may result in greater dispersion of droplets from each participant due to higher intensity breathing in addition to participant movement. Instructors should be positioned well away from participants, and strictly observe the 3m appropriate spacing between participants in these types of activities.
- Mark a designated exercise area for each client to stay inside of during a workout.

- Consider removing unused equipment from group fitness rooms to create additional space for clients.
- Clients should be encouraged to bring their own personal exercise mats and other gear for personal use whenever practical to reduce sharing of equipment. This may include items such as helmets, racquets, goggles, yoga mats and blocks, gloves, weight belts, and shin, wrist or ankle guards.
- The use of sports gloves is not recommended
- All equipment must be disinfected after use by each client
- Consider using small exercise equipment so that their regular disinfection is less likely to be a hindrance.
- Schedule time between classes to allow for appropriate cleaning and disinfecting.

Personal Training

- Advise both clients and trainers to arrive close to their appointment time.
- Personal trainers are to wear a mask at all times.
- All physical contact must be eliminated – coaching sessions should be conducted in a manner that avoids touching clients, advise all trainers and clients to refrain from physical contact and adhere to the 3 metre physical distancing requirement from each other and 3 metres from other customers during the session.
- Discourage training activities that necessitate close contact with other people (e.g., needing spotters during weight training, sparring in martial arts studios).
- As much as possible, consider using verbal cues while coaching or using technology to share instructional material and practice plans.
- For activities involving technique demonstration, ensure that hand hygiene and equipment disinfection is practiced using an alcohol-based hand rub or handwashing before and after contact.
- Limit the number of personal trainers on site at any one time to ensure facility capacity is not exceeded.

FACILITIES

- Keeping a distance of 2 m from others must be adhered to at all times (3m while exercising)
- Provision of water dispensers is prohibited.
- Use of changing rooms and showers should be discouraged.
- Locker rooms, toilets and showers must be disinfected every hour.
- No air flow dryers or revolving cloth towels are allowed, paper towels recommended.
- Provision of towels to clients is prohibited – all clients should bring their own towels.

STAFF CARE

- Employers must implement measures to reduce the risk of person-to-person transmission.
- The use of protective equipment is recommended for the entire fitness centre staff.
- To minimise the risk of having to quarantine all staff in case of a COVID positive person in the fitness centre, it is recommended that establishments divide staff into at least two independent teams. Should one of the teams have to be quarantined, the other team would be able to continue. In the case of such an eventuality, complete disinfection of the fitness centre must be done.
- In addition to the means for regular hand disinfection, it is necessary to provide the staff with protective hand creams - frequent disinfection may dry the skin, the use of creams prevents skin problems.

Cleaning, Disinfection & Aeration,

- Rigorous cleaning procedures must be adopted.
- Disinfection of all equipment after each client.
- At all times there must be a specific person allocated to ensure cleaning of all equipment is done with a certain amount of rigor, using disinfectants that have properties to kill SARS-CoV2. All equipment must be disinfected by this person at least 3 times per day.
- Gyms must be well ventilated, circulating fresh air. HVAC systems should have adequate air turnover rates and appropriate filters. It is necessary to use air conditioning with separate air supply and exhaust.
- If air conditioning is not possible, it is recommended to use air disinfection equipment and combine it with regular ventilation.
- The use of fans is prohibited, as these work as air mixing – circulating the same air. High-powered fans may result in greater dispersion of droplets. Consider further reducing class, group or total occupancy limits to maintain room temperature at manageable levels without the use of high-powered fans.

Cleaning and disinfecting measures

A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing the COVID-19 virus. There shall be ongoing cleaning and disinfection operations of all the common areas. Premises must be cleaned at least daily. Cleaning with detergent and water is sufficient. Once clean, surfaces can be disinfected. When and how often the premises should be disinfected will depend on the likelihood of contamination. Alternatively, cleaners may be able to do a 2-in-1 clean and disinfection by using a combined detergent and disinfectant.

How to clean and disinfect

Cleaning means to physically remove germs (bacteria and viruses), dirt and grime from surfaces using a detergent and water solution. A detergent is designed to break up oil and

grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work. Cleaning should start with the cleanest surface first, progressively moving towards the dirtiest surface. When surfaces are cleaned, they should be left as dry as possible to reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as spreading of viruses and bacteria through droplets.

Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. Disinfectants containing $\geq 70\%$ alcohol, ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (surfaces where liquids pool, and do not soak in). The packaging or manufacturer's instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

Areas to be cleaned and disinfected

Any surfaces that are frequently touched should be prioritised for cleaning, e.g. door handles, seating, counters, phones, POS machines, vending machines, acrylic screens (if installed), all gym equipment and bathroom and other sanitary facilities, including bathroom fixtures like taps and flushing handles, changing rooms, shower rooms and locker rooms. Any surfaces that are visibly dirty, or have a spill, should be cleaned as soon as they are identified, regardless of when they were last cleaned. The entire premises should be cleaned and disinfected at least every day. If the premises have many patrons entering each day, more frequent disinfection of areas used by patrons is recommended. Gym equipment that must be disinfected every hour.

Establishments should have protocols in place for actions to be taken in case a patron or member or staff develops coronavirus symptoms while on the premises, including appropriate cleaning and disinfection.

What should cleaners wear?

In most circumstances, it will not be necessary for cleaners to wear protective clothing to clean the premises. However, workers should use personal protective equipment (PPE) that is necessary for the products they are using. Gloves and a disposable apron are the minimum requirements. Medical masks should be used if cleaning an area impacted by a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case. Clothes that can be washed afterwards are suitable.

How to stay informed: www.covid19health.gov.mt