

Gyms and fitness centres: Protocols for returning to operation

The following content was posted to WorkSafeBC's website on July 31, 2020. For the most current version, please visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

These protocols provide guidance to employers at fitness and recreational facilities including gyms, yoga and dance studios, and recreation centres. These employers may also benefit from reviewing other protocols if their workplace includes other work environments such as offices, retail services, or food and drink services. Employers must also ensure they are abiding by any orders, notices, or guidance issued by the provincial health officer, and the appropriate health authority, that are relevant to their workplace.

Developing a COVID-19 safety plan

Employers are required to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Employers must involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace.

The COVID-19 Safety Plan follows the six steps outlined on COVID-19 and returning to safe operation. You can also refer to the COVID-19 Safety Plan OHS Guideline for information about developing a safety plan, including the level of detail required and use of supporting documentation.

Employers are not required to submit plans to WorkSafeBC for approval, but in accordance with the order of the provincial health officer, this **plan must be posted** at the worksite and on their website, if they have one. During a WorkSafeBC inspection, we will ask employers about the steps they have taken to protect their workers or to see the plan if it has been developed.

One part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep workers safe. We've provided industry-specific protocols below to consider as you develop the plan for your workplace.

These protocols are not a list of requirements; however, they should be considered and implemented to the extent that they address the risks your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if the protocols suggested here do not sufficiently address the risk to your workers.

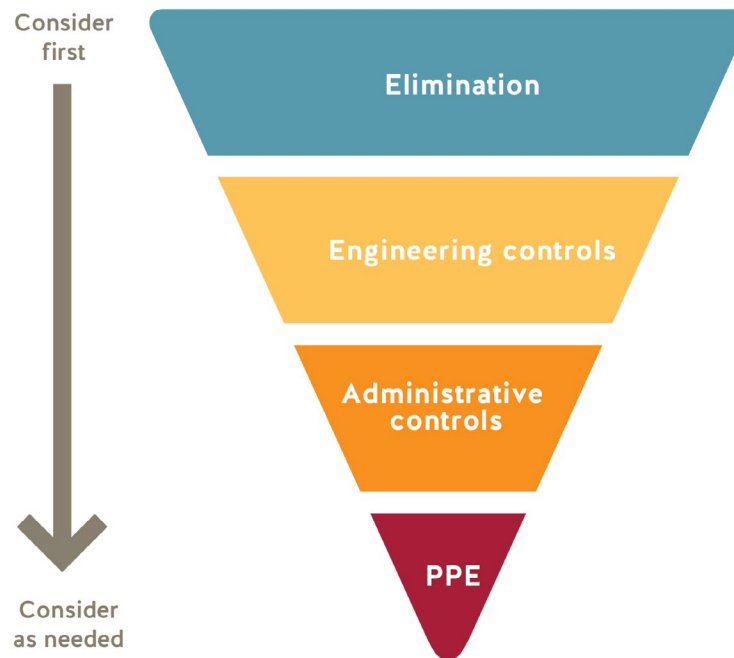
Understanding the risk

The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways, including through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, and from touching a contaminated surface before touching the face. Higher risk situations require adequate protocols to address the risk.

- The risk of person-to-person transmission is increased the closer you come to other people, the amount of time you spend near them, and the number of people you come near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.
- The risk of surface transmission is increased when many people contact same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

Selecting protocols for your workplace

Note that different protocols offer different protection. Wherever possible, use the protocols that offer the highest level of protection and add additional protocols as required.



First level protection (elimination): Use policies and procedures to keep people at a safe physical distance from one another. Limit the number of people in your workplace at any one time, and implement protocols to keep workers at least 2 metres from other workers, customers, and members of the public.

Second level protection (engineering controls): If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install barriers such as plexiglass to separate people.

Third level protection (administrative controls): Establish rules and guidelines, such as cleaning protocols, telling workers to not share tools, or implementing one-way doors or walkways.

Fourth level protection (PPE): If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to control the risk, consider the use of masks. Ensure masks are selected and cared for appropriately and that workers are using masks correctly.

Protocols for gyms and fitness centres

Managing people in the facility

- Establish and post occupancy limits that ensure the physical distancing requirement can be maintained. See the COVID-19 Safety Plan for guidance on establishing occupancy limits. Consider floor surface area, possible reconfiguration of accessible areas, and availability of equipment when determining capacity limit.
- If additional strategies are needed to manage the number of people at the facility, consider using a booking system with set duration workout periods. Request that customers do not arrive more than 5 minutes before their appointment and coordinate appointment times to avoid crowding and reduce wait times.

- Inform clients when they book an appointment of your policies restricting people exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 from the facility. Clients should be advised that they must cancel an appointment if they develop symptoms after making an appointment. Communicate your illness policy and facility protocols to customers prior to their appointment. Consider adjusting your cancellation policy to allow for customers to cancel or reschedule appointments without penalty should they develop symptoms.
- Place signs near entrances informing customers not to enter the facility if they are exhibiting symptoms. Ensure signage is placed at a location where it is visible, draws attention, and is readable.
- Consider managing where and how people can travel through your facility. This may include designating doorways for entrance and exit, and using one-way staircases or walkways. Post signage indicating how these rules can be followed.
- Prop doors open so people can pass through without touching handles.

Front desk and sales

- Ensure that workers and customers are able to maintain physical distance. Mark spaces on the floor where people can stand at the front desk with intervals of 2 metres for customers to line up. If physical distance cannot be maintained, barriers such as plexiglass or polymer barriers, may be used.
- Reconfigure waiting areas to maintain the physical distancing requirement (e.g., remove tables and chairs).
- Encourage the use of contactless payment methods. Ensure your hand hygiene policies include the requirement for workers to wash hands after handling cash, passes, membership cards, and other shared items.
- Provide adequate handwashing or hand sanitizer stations for customers and staff to use upon entering the facility and when leaving.
- Remove unnecessary communal items such as candy, magazines, and complimentary phone chargers.
- Provide a lined waste bin for customers to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and other safety equipment, such as masks and gloves, when entering and exiting the facility.
- Staff training should be held online if possible or in small groups with physical distancing measures in place.
- Communicate the facility's protocols to delivery people and couriers through signage posted at the workplace. These people are expected to follow the same procedures for physical distancing and hygiene that others at the workplace must follow.
- Delivery drivers and couriers are also subject to the same restrictions prohibiting individuals who are sick, symptomatic, or in self-isolation from entering the workplace.

Hand hygiene

- Establish handwashing policies and hygiene practices and post these throughout the facility. Ensure handwashing or sanitizing stations are available and easily accessible.
- Instruct customers to wash their hands before and after a workout and to use hand sanitizer when transitioning between pieces of equipment. Provide supplies for this throughout the facility.
- Ensure used tissues, disinfectant wipes, and safety equipment are properly disposed of in a lined waste bin that is emptied at least daily.

Equipment layout

- Consider the layout of equipment and fitness areas to ensure adequate spacing is available to clients. Position equipment at least 2 metres apart with greater distancing for aerobic fitness equipment where high exertion is common (e.g., treadmills, rowing machines, and spin bikes).
- 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.
- If equipment cannot be moved and will result in people being within 2 metres from one another, you may erect barriers, such as plexiglass, between pieces of equipment.

Group classes

- Group classes should only be offered if physical distancing measures can be maintained. The provincial health officer's order on gatherings and events, which prohibits gatherings of more than 50 people, applies to fitness or group classes.
- Consider holding outdoor classes to ensure the 2 metre physical distancing requirement is maintained.
- High-intensity classes may result in greater dispersion of droplets from each participant due to higher intensity breathing in addition to participant movement. Position instructors well away from participants, and follow guidance from public health on the appropriate spacing between participants in these types of activities.
- High-powered fans may result in greater dispersion of droplets. Consider further reducing class sizes to maintain room temperature at manageable levels without the use of high-powered fans.
- 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.

Personal training

- Consider the use of technology for virtual training where possible.
- Advise both clients and trainers to arrive close to their appointment time. Ensure that the waiting area is configured so that people can maintain physical distancing.
- Ensure trainers and customers refrain from physical contact and adhere to the 2 metre physical distancing requirement from each other and 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, and games in contact sports).
- As much as possible, coaching sessions should be conducted in a manner that avoids touching clients. Consider using verbal cues while coaching or using technology to share instructional material and practice plans.
- For activities involving direct contact, ensure that hand hygiene 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.

Climbing walls

- Establish and post occupancy limits that ensure the physical distancing requirement can be maintained. It may be necessary to restrict access to these areas for spectators and other non-participants.

- Modify route setting and climbing space, by zone, density adjustments, and limited climbing lanes (e.g., reduction of anchors and removal of ropes).
- Provide handwashing stations in close proximity to climbing spaces so that chalk residue can be removed prior to hand sanitization. Post expectations for participants to wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after using shared equipment (e.g., climbing holds).
- Ensure rental equipment is included in the cleaning and disinfecting plan.

Saunas and steam rooms

- Establish and post occupancy limits that ensure the physical distancing requirement can be maintained.
- Provide handwashing or hand sanitizing stations and advise customers to use these before and after using the facility.
- Ensure these areas are addressed in the cleaning and disinfecting plan. Refer to WorkSafeBC guidance on effective cleaning and disinfecting practices.

Locker rooms, showers, and washrooms

- Establish and post occupancy limits of each area to ensure the physical distancing requirement can be maintained.
- Ensure these areas are addressed in your cleaning and disinfecting plan. Refer to WorkSafeBC guidance on effective cleaning and disinfecting practices.
- Remove unnecessary items to facilitate the cleaning of these areas.
- Consider removing complimentary shared personal items such as hairspray, hairdryers, and deodorant sprays. If they are still offered, ensure the bottles are included in the cleaning and disinfecting plan.
- Determine how people should move through these locations to maintain the physical distancing requirement. Tape can be used on the floor to designate walking and changing areas, and may also identify one-way walkways if this will help keep people separate.
- Consider blocking off some lockers so that people don't need to stand close together to access their items.

Linens and towels

- Consider temporarily not offering this service.
- If linen service is still offered, establish policies to ensure all laundry is handled appropriately. Provide clearly marked laundry bins and ensure dirty linens are laundered before next use. Enhanced laundering practices are not required above the usual practices in place.

Equipment cleaning and disinfecting

- Establish and post clear policies requiring clients to wipe down equipment before and after every use. Provide adequate supplies and garbage bins for disposing used materials.
- Instruct clients that they must allow equipment surfaces to air dry naturally before using.
- Consider keeping all non-stationary equipment in one area to facilitate cleaning and disinfecting in between uses. Station an employee nearby to wipe down equipment after each use before being put back into circulation. Some examples of non-stationary equipment include balls, blocks, mats, resistance bands, paralletes, skipping ropes, wobble boards, and foam rollers.
- Include all equipment in your facility's cleaning and disinfecting plan.

- Schedule time between classes to allow for appropriate cleaning and disinfecting.
- Encourage customers to bring their own 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.

Tanning services

- Provide handwashing or sanitizing stations at the entrance to the tanning room and post signage asking clients to use these before entering.
- Workers and clients should not be in a sunbed/sunless room at the same time. Provide adequate space for people to move through hallways and into treatment rooms. Consider marking off walking and standing areas so everyone is clear where they should be positioned when walking through tight areas.
- Ensure equipment and other high touch surfaces are fully cleaned and disinfected between each use, including beds, buttons, bed handles, door handles, and coat hooks. Always follow label instructions and ensure that cleaners and disinfectants are appropriate for the equipment. Some products may need to be rinsed off with clean water before use to prevent skin irritation.
- Establish policies to ensure all laundry is handled appropriately. Provide clearly marked laundry bins and ensure dirty linens are laundered before next use. Enhanced laundering practices are not required above the usual practices in place.
- If tanning services require a worker to be present (i.e., in the application of spray tans), ensure 2 metres of physical distance is maintained wherever possible. If this is not possible, and if the installation of a barrier is not possible, masks should be worn to reduce the risk of transmission. Cloth and surgical masks may not protect the wearer from the virus because they do not form a tight seal with the face, but they can reduce the spread of the wearer's respiratory droplets to others. For that reason, clients should be required to wear masks for these services to protect workers. Workers should also wear masks to protect clients. Refer to WorkSafeBC guidance on selecting and using masks.
- Clients should bring their own goggles, or single-use items should be used.

For more information

The information on this page is based on current recommendations and may change. For the latest guidance, please see the health information from the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control and the latest news from the government of British Columbia.

If you have a question or concern

Workers and employers with questions or concerns about workplace exposure to COVID-19 can call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland (toll-free within B.C. at 1.888.621.SAFE). You'll be able to speak to a prevention officer to get answers to your questions, and if required, a prevention officer will be assigned to assess the health and safety risk at your workplace.

Translated resources

Our key COVID-19 related resources are also available in Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), French, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.