



FITNESS INDUSTRY COUNCIL OF CANADA

Framework for exercise facilities operating in a COVID -19 environment in Canada

This document is designed to provide a framework for managing risks associated with COVID-19 within exercise facilities and exercise providers in Canada. It provides recommendations for exercise providers that are evidence based and follow a risk-minimisation model. These guidelines have been modeled after successful industry launches in New Zealand as well as British Columbia. Specifically, the Fraser Valley Health Region.

✦ **Each facility is encouraged to create their own set of operating procedures with more granular details. Check guidelines from your local health authority.**



01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A. **Fitness Industry Council of Canada (FIC)** is a non-profit trade association representing for profit, non-profit, municipal, boutique, and large format fitness facilities across the country. We also represent interests of fitness education, certification providers, and industry suppliers.

Representing over 6,000 facilities serving over 6 million members nationwide, FIC pursues a legislative agenda in the hopes of bettering the fitness industry for both consumers and professionals.

We would like to thank our colleagues from the Exercise Association of New Zealand, the Alberta Boutique Studio Alliance and Alberta Recreation and Parks Association for their contributions to this document.

- B. **Benefits of exercise:** While not specifically outlined in this document, it should be noted that regular exercise is one of the most beneficial activities an individual can undertake to improve their health.

Normally, the list of the benefits of exercise is wide and varied – everything from being protective against stroke, heart disease, and many other chronic diseases and conditions, all the way through to its role in weight management and diabetes control.

However, right now the focus is around mental health, and its proven benefits for mental health, which is protective against both depression and anxiety – two looming issues in a COVID-19 environment.

It should also be mentioned that COVID-19 seems to pose an increased risk to Canadians who have underlying health concerns, many of which fall under various categories of metabolic disease. Regular exercise is well known to combat many of these ailments.

- C. **This framework:** This document provides evidence based solutions and recommendations to the unique environments of an exercise setting, operating within a COVID-19 environment.
- D. Our recommended protocols and practices meet all Government general principles and guidelines to operate at phase 2, while also considering the unique environment and challenges of an exercise setting.

The example operations document will provide granular detail to identify the unique and/or increased risks related to COVID-19 within an exercise setting, and provides stringent and specific protocols to manage these risks.

We are recommending that all exercise providers in Canada follow these protocols.



02 BACKGROUND ON COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disease is caused by the SARS CoV-2 virus. It is a devastating virus because while it only kills about 1% of those it infects, it infects a lot of people. It is nearly three times as infectious as the seasonal flu.

The risk of serious disease or death increases significantly with age and other health conditions like respiratory, cardiac, diabetic disease or high BMI's. Mortality rates can approach 20% for these at-risk groups.

While rare, it can also severely affect even young, healthy people. There is even a possibility it could rarely affect children.

Statistically speaking, eighty percent of people will have mild or no symptoms. Fifteen percent will be moderate and may need hospitalisation. Five to six percent will have severe symptoms, with some needing to be on a mechanical ventilator. The problem that the human immune system has defending it is that it is a novel virus. It is new to humans, so we have no immunity from prior infection to it.

This is what makes it so unpredictable. SARS-2 virus can last on surfaces like glass, plastic and cardboard for up to two or three days but it is unlikely that virus on those surfaces would be infectious after much more than 48 hours as viral numbers drop to low levels by then.

There are two main routes of infection:

1. Respiratory (inhaled virus through the air).
2. Contact an infected surface with your hand and then touch your mouth, nose, or eyes.

It is possible from 'sneeze studies' that some virus could be exhaled in small, light 'aerosol' type particles and remain airborne beyond 2-metres (2M). The usual medical rule is for transfer is that individuals need to have to be in close range (less than 2M) for more than 10 minutes to pick up virus through inhaled air (unless someone is spraying saliva as they talk, or are sneezing).

A vaccine for this is unlikely in large quantities within 18-24 months. Some of the best ways to keep your immune system working well are getting enough sleep, staying physically active and maintaining a healthy diet.



03 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this framework are:

- A. To develop a framework that provides a safe environment for participants to return to exercise facilities in Canada that meets both Canadian government standards, but also considers international best practices.
- B. Provide guidance to those operating exercise facilities in Canada.
- C. To provide 'Trust and Confidence' to both the Government, and the public, that the fitness industry takes COVID-19 safety seriously, and is taking all practical steps for this serious issue.
- D. To provide protocols for exercise providers to exceed the provincial standards to safely operate in phase 2.

04 ASSUMPTIONS

All participants in a facility are treated as if they are possible infected with COVID-19.

Restrictions in government operations will be in place for the foreseeable future, thus requiring operators to create sustainable changes to their operational strategies.

This is a fluid document. The standards set forth are based on international best practices and could change rapidly. The most up to date recommendations can be found at <https://ficdn.ca/covid-19-operations/>

Our strategy will involve 4 keys pillars:

1. Containment and contact tracing
2. Cleaning and sanitization
3. Staffing
4. Operations



01 CONTAINMENT AND CONTACT TRACING

- A. **Control access:** Gyms and fitness centres need to have at least one staff member is present when open. Maintaining physical distancing cannot be ensured if patrons have uncontrolled access. Additionally, staff are needed to ensure that disinfection of equipment is being performed after each use. 24-hour unrestricted access without staff present on site should not be allowed
- B. **Limit occupancy:** The number of patrons allowed into the facility at any one time should be limited to:
- Ensure there's sufficient space to allow patrons to remain two metres from one another
 - Prevent large gatherings
 - Allow staff sufficient time to clean equipment and other surfaces frequently

Based on the above considerations, Operators need to determine what the maximum number of persons is they can safely allow in the facility in advance of opening.

Consider using a booking system that allows a limited number of patrons to book and attend a specified time slot. Ensure there is sufficient time between time slots to allow for cleaning and disinfection of the facility and equipment.

- C. **Post signs:** Place signs at any entrance to notify patrons that they should not enter if they have the symptoms of COVID-19 (see "d" below). Signs should be posted throughout the facility to make patrons aware of the physical distancing requirements, enhanced sanitation procedures (including reminders for members to wipe equipment before and after each use), and any other instructions and limitations, as applicable.
- D. **Screen arriving patrons:** Patrons can be asked the following questions when they arrive:
- Do you have any of the following symptoms: fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat and painful swallowing, stuffy or runny nose, loss of sense of smell, headache, muscle aches, fatigue or loss of appetite?
 - Are you, or anyone you are living with, either sick, self-isolating, or quarantined?

Any patron who answers yes to either of the questions above should not be permitted to enter. It is recommended that anyone who has the symptoms of COVID-19 call 8-1-1.

- E. **Manage customer entry points** - Place markers such as tape or cones every two metres at entrances to provide patrons with visible queues that encourage physical distancing. Entrances can also include entrances into rooms such as studios or locker rooms.



- F. Where possible, **increase the space** between cardio machines to achieve adequate distancing between users
Note: If it is not possible to space cardio machines far enough apart, other measures should be considered, such as only allowing patrons to use every other machine (i.e. not allowing two machines next to each other to be used at the same time) or creating barriers between each station/machine.
- G. **Encourage physical distancing and discourage congregating:** Patrons should be encouraged to conduct their workout and exit the facility without unnecessary delay.
- H. **Do not offer group classes unless patrons are able to remain two metres from one another at all times during a class:** If group classes are offered, they should also be scheduled to allow staff adequate time to clean equipment and surfaces before each class.
- I. **Close the following facilities and equipment within a gym or fitness centre:** basketball courts and other group sport areas that would not be able to accommodate social distancing. (Tennis would be ok, squash would need to be closed), saunas, and steam rooms
- J. **Limit locker room use and avoid use if possible:** Patrons should be encouraged to arrive at the gym or fitness centre in workout clothes and to avoid using locker rooms on site. When locker rooms are used, a disinfectant spray or wipes should be available for patrons to disinfect locker contact surfaces before and after use.
- K. **Where applicable, do not offer food service, other than take out**
- L. **Close customer water fountains:** Customers should be advised to bring their own filled water bottles or use touchless filling stations provided by the facility.
- M. Consider developing online fitness participation, if practical, until such time that physical distancing recommendations are suspended

The fitness industry is very well equipped to both contain the spread of the virus within a facility, but also assist provincial health authorities with timely and accurate contact tracing upon request.



02 CLEANING AND SANITIZATION

- A. **Members will be empowered to sanitize their equipment both before and after use.** Disinfectants for patrons should be conveniently located. Patrons should be required to wipe down the equipment with disinfectant wipes before and after use. Discontinue use of re-usable towels and cloths.
- B. **Use appropriate disinfectants** - Gyms and fitness centres must verify that any disinfectant(s) they use are effective against SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19). To do this, either:
 - i. Use the list on Health Canada's website to identify if a disinfectant has been reviewed and confirmed to be effective against SARS-CoV-2
 - ii. Use the list on the EPA's website to identify if a disinfectant has been reviewed and confirmed to be effective
 - iii. Contact the disinfectant supplier or manufacturer to identify if the disinfectant has been confirmed to be effective
 - iv. Make a 500 parts per million chlorine disinfectant solution using bleach and water. To make a solution of this concentration: mix 1 part bleach to 99 parts water (e.g. mix 10 ml bleach (5.25%) with 990 ml water)
- C. Staff will perform **routine sanitization of high touch items** such as door handles, taps, cardiovascular equipment consoles. The industry suppliers have made recommendations on proper cleaning chemicals for various surfaces (plastic, vinyl, tile, etc.).
- D. **Studios** will be thoroughly cleaned after each class and classes will be scheduled to accommodate sufficient cleaning between them.
- E. **Hard to clean equipment** such as foam rollers, yoga blocks, straps, ropes, etc. **will be removed** from usage. **Shared equipment** (boxing gloves) would be removed.
- F. Carpets must be vacuumed daily.
- G. Cleaning logs will be kept and made available upon request.
- H. Staff who are undertaking deep cleans will be provided with PPE such as gloves and masks.



03 STAFFING – TO ENSURE STAFF SAFETY, THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES ARE RECOMMENDED

- A. **Contactless interactions** for both checking into a facility and providing payment.
- B. **Staff who feel unwell** would be expected to stay home and self quarantine for 14 days.
- C. **Staff will need to be trained** to follow all new operating procedures.

04 OPERATIONS – these steps will help operators create their own policy and procedure manuals considering common interaction touch points with consumers:

- A. **Checking-in to the facility**
 - i. Spacing upon entrance.
 - ii. Contactless check in
- B. **Locker-rooms**
 - i. Spacing upon entrance and exit
 - ii. Locker assignments or spacing
 - iii. Cleaning of high touch surfaces.
- C. **Cardiovascular equipment**
 - i. Spacing to accommodate physical distancing.
 - ii. Cleaning of high touch surfaces.
- D. **Strength Training**
 - i. Spacing to accommodate for physical distancing.
 - ii. Directional floor markers to assist with traffic flow.
 - iii. Removal of hard to clean items such as foam rollers, ropes
- E. **Yoga / MindBody**
 - i. Spacing to accommodate physical distancing
 - ii. Spacing upon entrance in the studio
 - iii. Removal of hard to clean items such as foam blocks, yoga straps.
 - iv. Studio clean before and after each class
- F. **Indoor Cycle (spin)**
 - i. Spacing to accommodate physical distancing
 - ii. Studio clean before and after each class
- G. Control application of no-show fees such that they do not encourage participants to attend despite feeling ill.
- H. Reduce hours of operation for 24-hour facilities to ensure proper conduct by members as well as cleaning protocols by staff



+ **CONTACT US**

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