

# COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Gyms, Fitness Studios and Community Centres

## Guidance for Safely Reopening Gyms, Fitness Studios and Community Centres

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### Key Points

- The capacity limit for indoor venues is 50 patrons and 100 patrons for outdoor venues, applied on a per room basis.
- Physical distancing of **at least 2 metres** (6 feet) between participants, enhanced cleaning and disinfection throughout the facility, and strict promotion of hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are critical to safe reopening.
- Face coverings are required by staff and patrons in enclosed public spaces (unless exemptions apply).
- Food and beverage sales or operations within gyms, fitness studios and community centres must comply with the Food Premises Regulation and adhere to best practices while operating.

**The COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly. This guidance is subject to change. Please visit the Southwestern Public Health website ([www.swpublichealth.ca/](http://www.swpublichealth.ca/)) regularly for updates and additional guidance.**

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This document provides guidance for businesses reopening facilities for **gyms, fitness studios, and community centres**. For all other outdoor and indoor facility guidance and recommendations (e.g. soccer fields, baseball diamonds, indoor pools, ice rinks etc.) please go visit [here](#).

Gyms, fitness studios and community centres may reopen as part of the Province of Ontario's [Framework for Reopening Plan: Stage 3](#).

As of August 15, 2020, the Government of Ontario has advised the capacity limit of 50 patrons for indoor venues and 100 patrons for outdoor venues is applicable on a **per room** basis. Facilities can have up to 50 patrons for each indoor sport, fitness room or community centre/multi-purpose facility room.

On July 30, 2020, Southwestern Public Health issued a letter of instruction to businesses to implement mandatory face coverings in all enclosed public spaces in Oxford County, Elgin County and the City of

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St. Thomas. Employees must also wear a face covering in enclosed employee spaces if physical distancing is not possible. Here are [additional details](#) and [FAQ](#) about this Letter of Instruction.

**Gathering limits for gyms, fitness studios and community centres now apply on a per room basis. Every person that engages in sports or recreational fitness activities at the facility (other than a team sport) must maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person at all times.**

Organized programs/activities or classes	<b>Cannot exceed 50 people indoors or 100 people outdoors. Must be able to maintain physical distance.</b>
Free weights/exercise machines area	<b>Cannot exceed 50 people. Must be able to maintain physical distance.</b>
Spectators	<b>Limited to the number that can maintain two metres physical distance, and cannot exceed 50 indoors or 100 outdoors.</b>
Private events/rentable space	<b>Cannot exceed 50 people indoors or 100 people outdoors. Must be able to maintain physical distance.</b>

People at their place of work (e.g. fitness instructors, cleaners, front desk reception), **do not** count towards gathering limits. Indoor gathering limits apply to events that are fully or partially indoors. Indoor events and gatherings cannot be combined with an outdoor event or gathering to increase the applicable gathering size. If these gathering restrictions produce significant difficulties for your facility to operate, owners/operators are invited to visit [www.Ontario.ca/reopen](http://www.Ontario.ca/reopen) to work with the province on a customized reopening plan.

Other key conditions for reopening include:

- All facilities are required to engineer their spaces, so individuals are able to maintain the required physical distancing of at least two metres (6 feet) between participants.
- A plan for enhanced cleaning and disinfection needs to be in place.
- A plan to promote and support excellent hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to patrons needs to be in place (e.g., signage, availability of hand sanitizer).
- The wearing of face coverings by staff and patrons at all times. Face coverings may be temporarily removed when engaging in an activity where a face covering would inhibit the person's ability to breathe, such as during athletic, fitness or physical activity or any activity that would preclude its use (such as swimming).
- Steam rooms and saunas are not permitted to open at this time.

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### Staff Screening

Before each shift, please actively **screen** staff to identify if they:

- Have **symptoms** of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or difficulty breathing.
- Have had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
- Have been instructed by public health to self-isolate due to travel or contact history.

**Any staff that answers “yes” to any of these conditions should be sent home and advised to follow public health guidance.** Staff should be reminded to stay home if they are sick.

### General Facility Considerations

- Encourage physical distancing and discourage congregating
  - Stagger scheduling for the use of all amenities in the facility (e.g. workout areas, classes, rinks, courts, spectators, etc) to support physical distancing in common areas including entrances, exits, and stairwells.
    - The ability to maintain physical distance of 2 metres in common areas may not be possible if the permitted limit in each room, area or amenity is utilized at the same time. If this is the case, not all rooms, areas or amenities may be able to be open at one time.
  - Consider limiting spectators if there is not sufficient space in common areas such as washrooms, hallways, and other areas or amenities.
  - Limit capacity of rooms to ensure physical distancing is possible. A general recommendation is to allow 4-5 square metres per person, or about 25% of fire code occupancy.
    - For high-intensity physical activities consider a physical distance of more than 2 metres between patrons.
  - Develop a plan to allow for uncongested entry and exit, such as dedicated one-way entry and exit pathways for each activity area.
  - Patrons should be encouraged to conduct their workout and exit the facility without unnecessary delay. Equipment should not be shared or used simultaneously (e.g. working in sets).
- Large areas, such as weight rooms, gymnasiums, and sports courts can be subdivided into one or more separate areas, separated by a non-permeable barrier to allow each room to have a capacity of 50 patrons at any one time.
  - The barrier should ideally span from floor to ceiling, or at least be above the breathing zone of individuals.
  - Patrons should be restricted to one sport or recreational fitness room or area for the duration of their scheduled activity.

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- Washrooms, locker rooms, change rooms and showers
  - o Encourage patrons to arrive at the gym or fitness centre in workout clothes and to avoid using locker rooms on site.
  - o When locker rooms are used, a disinfectant spray or wipes should be available for patrons to disinfect locker contact surfaces before and after use.
  - o Clean and disinfect washrooms, locker rooms, change rooms and showers frequently.
  - o Set capacity limits for locker rooms and adjust lockers to support physical distancing.
  - o Remove self-serve and common-use items such as hair dryers.
  - o Ensure washrooms are always stocked with liquid soap and paper towel. Antibacterial soap is not required to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Drinking fountains and water bottle filling stations
  - o Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfecting according to manufacturer's recommendations.
  - o Place signage at water fountains advising users to:
    - Avoid placing their mouth on the spout of the fountain or allowing their water bottle to come into contact with the nozzle.
    - Wash hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) if the fountain requires touching of buttons or levers.
  - o If possible, recommend patrons bring their own water supply to reduce amount of use fountains receive.
- Facility ventilation systems should be both operational and appropriate for the activities practiced within. Support healthy indoor air quality by:
  - o Maintaining appropriate humidity levels.
  - o Limiting the use of overhead ceiling fans or portable pedestal fans as much as possible. If fans are used, minimize air flow that directs current from one person directly toward another.
  - o Air filters used in ventilation systems should consider MERV-14 or High Efficiency Participate Air (HEPA) rated filters.
  - o Provide natural ventilation by opening windows and doors wherever possible to increase air flow.

### Control Access

- A staff member should always be present when the facility is open. If patrons have uncontrolled access, then it may not be possible to ensure that rules regarding physical distancing are followed and that disinfection of equipment between uses is occurring. Unrestricted access 24 hours a day without staff present should be suspended (if this is normally offered).
- Consider implementing a booking system to allow patrons to book specified time slots, with a limited number of patrons at each time. Allow adequate time between time slots to ensure that proper cleaning and disinfection can occur and to reduce crowding at check-in.

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- Encourage patrons to use the [COVID19 Online Self-Assessment Tool](#) or screening checklist before every visit to the facility and/or set up screening stations away from the entrance to avoid crowding.
- Manage customer entry points by placing tape markers or cones every two metres (6 feet) to provide patrons with a visible queue that encourages physical distancing.
- Consider keeping a log of the names and phone numbers for all customers with a check-in time so they can be traced later if necessary. This is **not** a requirement, only a strong recommendation.

### Group Fitness Classes

- The total number of people permitted in a class or organized activity at any one time is limited to the number of people that can maintain physical distancing of at least two metres or six feet (and cannot exceed the indoor gathering limit of 50 people or the outdoor limit of 100).
- Assigned spaces are strongly recommended for organized fitness classes (e.g. by marking circles on the floor to designate where each person should exercise).
- Instructors should be assigned and wear microphones to reduce the need for shouting or walking around.
- For high-intensity class (e.g. Zumba®, Spin®/cycle class, hot yoga, boot camp)
  - o Reduce the overall number of participants in classes to ensure that a minimum distance of 3 metres (10 feet) is maintained in all directions of each participant.
  - o Increase physical distance, or install physical barriers, between the instructor and participants.
  - o Participants should be encouraged to bring their own equipment. If this is not possible, equipment provided should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between uses. Ensure that adequate time is allowed for proper cleaning and disinfection.
  - o Participants singing along to the music or shout back at the instructor should be discouraged.
  - o Consider creating cohorts of classmates by assigning specific times for the same participants to partake in classes.
  - o Reduce opportunities for classmates to gather before and after a class within the facility.
  - o Ensure group fitness classrooms are well ventilated (e.g. open windows if possible).
- Low intensity fitness classes (e.g. Yoga, Pilates)
  - o Participants should be encouraged to bring their own equipment.
  - o Shared equipment should be cleaned and sanitized between users.
  - o Where fitness activities involve participants in close proximity to the floor, the floor should be cleaned thoroughly between each class.
  - o Participants should maintain 2 metres (6 feet) distance between each other at all times.

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### Weight Rooms and Exercise Machines

- The total number of people permitted in areas containing weights or exercise machines is limited to the number of people that can maintain physical distancing of at least two metres (6 feet) and cannot exceed the indoor gathering limit of 50 people.
- Consider using markers on the floor to define designated areas and manage flow of participants.
- Provide patrons with either disinfectant wipes or disinfectant in a spray bottle and paper towels for disinfecting equipment and surfaces.
  - o Disinfectants for patrons should be conveniently located. Patrons should be required to wipe down the equipment before and after use. Discontinue use of re-usable towels and cloths.
  - o Consider increasing frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of equipment by staff.
- Where possible, increase the space between cardio machines to achieve adequate distancing between users
  - o 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 physical barriers between machines.
  - o Consider greater distances (3 metres or 10 feet) between aerobic fitness equipment where high exertion is common (e.g., treadmills, rowing machines, stationary bikes).

### Signage

- Post a **sign** at the entrance reminding customers who are sick to delay their visit.
- Post **signage** at the entrance indicating that all persons entering or remaining inside an enclosed public space must wear a face covering.
- Post signs 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. Sample posters are found in the additional resources below.
- Use visual cues (e.g. signs, posters, floor markings, directional arrows, stanchions, etc) to guide patrons through the facility and ensure physical distancing.

### Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

- Enhanced **Cleaning and Disinfection** is critical to reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- It is important to first clean, then disinfect surfaces.
- Clean and sanitize high-touch surfaces frequently (door handles, countertops).
  - o Wipe down debit machine between customers with a disinfectant/sanitizer
- Whenever possible, use contactless forms of payment and check-in.

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- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) or handwashing stations at entry and exit points and in high traffic areas (i.e. lobby, change rooms, washrooms, workout/class areas) and encourage their use.
- Most regular household cleaning products are effective at eliminating the virus. Cleaning and disinfectant products should have an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) to confirm it is approved for use in Canada. Check the expiry dates of products and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Cleaning/disinfection wipes should only be used for surfaces, and according to the manufacturer's instructions. Alternatively, chlorine bleach solutions may be used for disinfection. Prepare fresh **bleach solution** daily.
- Educate staff on proper use of cleaning agents and disinfectants, including required disinfectant contact times (amount of time that the product will need to remain wet on a surface to achieve disinfection). Understand safety precautions and requirement for use of mask and gloves.
- Remove equipment that may be difficult to clean and disinfect (e.g. soft equipment such as foam rollers, yoga blocks, yoga mats, straps, ropes, etc).
- Remove communal items such as magazines and complimentary phone chargers.
- Enough time should be allocated to allow for the cleaning and disinfecting of rooms and equipment between bookings.
- Consider additional enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols for the facility overnight.

### Guidance on Food and Beverages

- Premises which provide or sell food must operate in compliance with the Food Premises Regulation.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect the premises before opening
  - o Wash, rinse and sanitize all food contact surfaces
  - o Clean and disinfect all non-food contact surfaces, including high touch areas, such as, door handles and equipment knobs
  - o Clean and disinfect all high touch surfaces at least twice daily during operation
- Check the condition of all food and discard unfit products.
- Ensure all equipment is in good working condition.
- Ensure staff are trained on best practices to serve food and beverages.
  - o Train staff on the proper use of gloves and face masks.
  - o Gloves are not required, but if used, must be changed between tasks and frequently, with handwashing between uses.
  - o Encourage frequent handwashing using the correct technique and to avoid touching one's face with unwashed hands.
  - o Practice safe respiratory etiquette (i.e. cough or sneeze into a bent elbow, and immediately wash your hands with soap and water).

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- For more information on operating a restaurant please see [Guidance for Restaurant Re-Opening](#).

### Face Coverings and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Staff must wear a face covering when in any enclosed public space. Staff must also wear a face covering when in enclosed employee spaces when physical distancing is not possible.
  - o If patrons are not wearing face coverings and physical distancing is not possible, a surgical/procedural mask worn by staff may be deemed appropriate.
- Patrons must wear a face covering at all times. Face coverings may be temporarily removed when engaging in an activity where a face covering would inhibit the person's ability to breathe, such as during athletic, fitness or physical activity or any activity that would preclude its use (such as swimming). Face coverings should be worn when patrons enter and exit the facility and in common areas such as locker rooms or washrooms.

### Additional Resources

Posters:

- [Do Not Enter if Sick](#)
- [Physical Distancing](#)
- [How to Wash Your Hands](#)
- [How to Sanitize Your Hands](#)
- [Face Covering Required](#)

Assessment:

- [COVID-19 Online Self-Assessment Tool](#)

### References

[Guidance for sport, physical activity and recreation--Alberta Health  
A Framework for Reopening our Province--Stage 3](#)