

Returning to work to teach classes or train clients?

This is CREP's guide for questions to ask and things to consider.

At this time, there is no specific guidance from public-health officials for reopening of fitness facilities and the return to work of exercise professionals.

But, that doesn't mean you need be ill-prepared. For those who are considered or asked to return to work in-facility or directly with clients, CREP urges you to ask yourself and/or the management of the facility where you work the following questions.

References & Resources:

- ▶ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- ▶ [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)
- ▶ [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation \(IHME\)](#)
- ▶ [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#)

Facilities

Has the facility created a written operating and sanitizing plan based on the best available guidance?

Every fitness facility and studio should prepare a detailed operating plan that serves as a guide for managing a progressive return to operations. The operating plan should be a living document, informed by the best available guidance, that considers social distancing guidelines to establish: amended capacities, revised cleaning and sanitizing protocols and schedules, expectations to staff, staff training protocols, and sets clear expectations for member and participant conduct. Clearly communicating revised policies, practices and expectations is critical to ensuring a safe environment for employees and participants and establishing consumer confidence in our industry's ability to serve our communities.

For the various exercise spaces, what are the revised capacities of the facility to maintain social distancing guidelines?

- General fitness floor
- Functional areas
- Group exercise classroom
- Cycle studio
- Pilates studio

Each area of the facility that will be open for the delivery of exercise programs should be measured and capacity assessed based on the CDC social distancing guidelines of maintaining a minimum of 6 feet between participants. For

example, if each person, including staff, are provided a minimum of 100 square feet, a 1,000 square foot room could accommodate a maximum of 10 individuals, though it is important to account for additional space to accommodate equipment and equipment access. Allowances should be provided for participants to queue for entry into rooms that maintain appropriate distancing.

Are there areas of the facility that will NOT be available for use?

- Social areas
- Locker rooms and showers
- Wet areas: pools and Jacuzzis
- Indoor & outdoor pools
- Dry/wet saunas
- Sports courts
- Climbing walls
- Dining or food service
- Childcare

Following the CDC social distancing guidelines may be impractical or impossible in some areas of the facility. After carefully considering how each area is used, a facility operator may determine that social distancing cannot be maintained in certain areas. In some cases, an area where practicing social distancing is determined to be impractical or impossible may be repurposed for uses that would allow social distancing.

How will the facility and room capacities be managed, enforced and communicated to members?

CDC social distancing guidelines may be used to determine a facility's total capacity, as well as the capacity limitations for each area of the facility. Clear and conspicuous signage communicating the capacity limits of each area may assist with enforcing capacity limits and maintaining social distancing. Assigning staff members to routinely monitor all areas of the facility and enforce capacity limits may also increase the adherence to social distancing within the facility. To more easily monitor overall capacity, a facility operator may reduce the number of entrances/exits that may be used by members and guests, while still maintaining all available entrances/exits required by local safety codes. Some facilities may elect to use a reservations-based system for members.

Cleaning

Has a detailed cleaning/sanitizing plan and schedule been created?

A schedule of cleaning and sanitizing should be detailed and clearly communicated with those responsible for upholding these duties. Ideally, a schedule will be posted requiring individuals to sign off when duties are completed. The CDC offers complete guidelines for cleaning practices which should be adhered to closely. Cleaning of equipment should be done immediately after use to avoid transmission from contact with these surfaces and commonly used surfaces should be cleaned hourly or more frequently during high traffic times.

The CDC guidelines for cleaning practices can be found at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.htm>

Consider installing things such as hand sanitizer devices and disinfecting wipes to remove bacteria and germs from equipment and high-touch surfaces to promote a healthier studio environment. When cleaning expensive equipment such as Pilates reformers, chairs and barrels, make sure to research recommendations for cleaning and sanitizing them while preserving the beauty of the wood, leather and vinyl.

Who will be responsible for the supervision of the cleaning process?

Department heads and supervisors should review the schedule daily and check with cleaning staff to address updates or modifications to the program. Staff should be clear about their responsibilities as to the frequency and method of cleaning that is required.

How will staff and members be trained?

The CDC provides guidelines for cleaning that can be reviewed in detail with staff members. Consider posting these instructions on signs throughout the facility to ensure that members are properly educated.

Where will the cleaning supplies be stored for all areas?

Ensure that hand sanitizer and spray bottles/wipes are provided in proper quantity to be easily accessible by staff and members for frequent use, while securing these items to ensure that they stay within the building, as shortages of these products have made for short supply.

How will members be informed of the cleaning routines and community cleaning responsibility?

For maximum protection from spreading the virus, all visitors to the facility will need to take collective responsibility for cleaning equipment between uses. Consider posting signs with the request that members clean equipment after use and provide the cleaning steps as described by the CDC to ensure proper understanding of disinfection procedures. Consider informing members of your cleaning protocol and schedule.

Equipment

How will access to equipment be adjusted to meet social distancing guidelines?

- *Example: Every other stationary weight machine/bench can be occupied, and members must follow well-marked flow of traffic signs.*

Depending on the availability of space to store equipment, heavy equipment may either be removed from the fitness floor or marked as unavailable for use to maintain social distancing. Portable equipment and accessories that cannot be adequately sanitized between users should be removed from the floor and stored. Directional arrows can be used to manage to traffic flow.

How will equipment be cleaned between users? By whom?

Policies regarding cleaning and sanitation of equipment should be created for each area of the facility with clear instructions regarding how equipment will be cleaned, which products should be used and a clear delineation of staff and participant responsibilities. Cleaning stations and appropriate signage may help with compliance.

Are there categories of equipment that cannot or should not be shared?

Equipment placed to meet current industry standard spacing guidelines may need to be reconfigured to limit access to every other piece of equipment, and by removing certain pieces to free up space and changing the direction to enter and exit pieces. Special consideration should be given to equipment where the customer may come in contact with the piece with their head or hands (e.g., head pads or hand grips). Equipment should be cleaned by maintenance and fitness staff on a regular schedule. Personal training staff should clean equipment before and after use by their clients. Equipment such as boxing gloves and shadow mittens should only be available for purchase and not lent by staff. Handles made of soft or absorbent material should not be used. This would include certain cable attachments, suspension equipment and certain functional training tools.

Rearrange Pilates reformers, chairs, barrels and other equipment to allow clients to safely practice Pilates. You may have to remove some equipment from your space to meet the guidelines. Also, consider asking clients and staff to remove their street shoes outside the studio.

Group Exercise & Personal Training

What classes and formats will be available?

Are there some formats that cannot be used in order to follow safety and social distancing guidelines? Will swimming, Silver Sneakers, and youth classes still be offered?

- *Example: In a boot camp–style class, rotating stations with sharing of equipment may not be feasible.*

Every fitness facility and studio should prepare and follow their own detailed policy guidelines to ensure the safety of group exercise class participants and group fitness instructors. The guidelines should take into account social distancing measures, room capacities, and cleaning and sanitizing protocols and schedules. New guidelines and expectations should be clearly communicated to both employees and members.

How will social distancing guidelines be maintained pre-class, during transitions, during class, and post-class?

- Will there be predetermined spaces per person?
- How will members enter and exit the space?

Signage on the floor and walls could indicate the appropriate distance between people as they wait to enter a group exercise space. In rooms with more than one entry or exit, members could be directed to enter only through one door and exit only through another door.

How will the schedule be adjusted to allow for adequate cleaning time?

- Will class length be altered?

Classes may have to be spread out on the schedule to allow more time between each class for sanitizing the room and equipment. Larger allocations of time between classes could also help reduce the number of participants passing each other as they enter and exit the group exercise area. Classes may be reduced by 15 to 20 minutes per class to ensure adequate time to finish and prepare for the next class.

Which equipment can be adequately cleaned between classes and which should not be shared?

- How will equipment set-up/clean-up be directed?

A detailed plan, including the time of day and frequency of cleaning, should be developed for all areas of the facility. A schedule for sanitizing shared equipment, including exercise machines, gear (e.g., handles, pads and mats) and group fitness instructor tools (e.g., microphones and stereo equipment), should be developed and implemented, along with clear guidelines about whom should administer the cleaning and best practices for doing it. The group fitness department will need to coordinate with other staff to ensure sufficient manpower is available to set up the studio for the next class. For applicable classes, customers may be encouraged to purchase an approved exercise mat or other portable equipment to bring to class for their personal use.

For Pilates, not only is it important to properly clean your large equipment, mats and accessories, you should also provide safer ways to use them. If you have cotton loops, purchase vinyl loop covers. Putting vinyl loop covers on makes them easy to clean between clients. You can also encourage your clients to purchase their own loops to minimize the spread of germs. If you normally provide mats for your Mat classes, consider asking people to bring their own mats. If you do not already sell all of these items at your studio, this may be an additional revenue stream to consider.

How will personal training and Pilates programs be modified/delivered to meet social distancing requirements?

When working one-on-one or in small groups, participants and exercise professionals should keep a safe distance of at least 6 feet from the instructor and other members. To accomplish this, stationary equipment must be set up at an

appropriate distance from other equipment and walkways and signage or markings on floors and walls could direct members and instructors where to be while performing an exercise. Further, signage could direct individuals along appropriate pathways as they make their way through the facility.

Member & Facility Access

How will members access the facility?

A facility operator may consider several measures to reduce the likelihood that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted within the facility. Such measures include monitoring all entrances and prohibiting entry to any staff, members or visitors who demonstrate symptoms related to COVID-19 or who may have been exposed to the virus. According to the CDC (April 30, 2020), symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Or at least two of these symptoms:

- Fever
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

Facility operators should refer to the CDC and local guidance to determine proper safety protocols for staff who are monitoring entrances, which may include gloves, eye protection and masks to cover the mouth and nose.

Consider starting slowly to return to your normal schedule and open in phases. For example:

- Weeks 1–2: Private sessions only with 1 or 2 teachers at a time in the space with clients.
- Week 3: Add small-group training and large equipment classes up to 5 people.
- Week 5: Add in classes with more than 5 people and limit to a maximum of 10 people generously spaced apart.

If you are currently offering virtual classes, consider continuing doing so for a few months and only offering small group classes with large equipment and private sessions in your physical space.

Will members be required to wear personal protective equipment (PPE)?

The CDC and most local health departments provide guidance to determine whether wearing PPE - such as gloves, eye protection and masks to cover the mouth and nose is advisable or, in some cases, mandatory. Notwithstanding guidance from the CDC and local health departments, facility operators may consider the advantages of providing members with the additional layer of safety provided by mandatory PPE requirements, such as masks to cover the mouth and nose.

Will members/clients be subject to health-status questions prior to accessing the facility?

Asking objective health-status screening questions related to the existence of symptoms and possible exposure to COVID-19 prior to entry to the facility and denying entry to individuals who show symptoms or who may have been exposed to the virus, may prevent viral transmission of COVID-19 within the facility.

What will be the policy if a member or staff person has been sick or has been in contact with someone who is, or has been, ill with COVID-19?

- Will physician's clearance and guidance be required for a return to activity?

The CDC provides guidance for how to [reduce transmission among employees](#), including guidance for encouraging sick employees to stay home and allowing them to return.

- How will privacy and confidentiality be maintained?

Information obtained by COVID-19 screening questions is entitled to the same privacy and confidentiality protections afforded other health information obtained by a fitness facility.

Staff

Will staff be subject to health-status questions prior to returning to work?

Guidelines for staff are likely to be subject to state and local employment laws. Ensure that you have referred to your local government for guidance. The CDC has provided guidance for businesses. Employees should be advised to stay home if they are sick and should also inform a supervisor if they have been in contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19. The CDC guidance can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

What will be the policy if an employee has been sick or has been in contact with someone who is, or has been, ill with COVID-19?

Follow CDC guidelines for employees who have been sick or in contact with someone who has been ill or diagnosed with COVID-19.

- Employees who have symptoms (e.g., fever, cough or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home and follow the [CDC recommendations](#). Employees should not return to work until the CDC criteria to discontinue home isolation are met. This should be done in consultation with healthcare providers. It may be appropriate to request return-to-work verification from a physician.
- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and follow [CDC recommended precautions](#).

Will staff be required to wear PPE? If yes, who will be supplying it and how often should it be replaced?

[OSHA has set standards](#) of risk for when to wear PPE based on the risk of infection of employees. At minimum, employees should be required to wear a mask while working, in accordance with CDC recommendations. Gloves may be considered during cleaning but should be discarded after use. Gloves are not a replacement for handwashing. If gloves are worn, they should be changed regularly and/or washed as frequently as hand washing, as gloves are not a protection from spreading germs from surface to surface.

What measures will be in place to ensure that staff are safe?

- At the front desk
- On the fitness floor
- In the classroom
- In the pool areas

OSHA guidelines recommend that companies ensure that staff and customers are able to maintain 6 feet or greater distance. Consider moving check-in scanners and computer terminals to ensure that the front desk staff can maintain

6 feet of distance from each other and customers as they enter. Consider marking 6 feet of distance in areas where lines may form.

Consider posting at the entrance and in several locations the facility's safety expectations of staff and members to ensure clarity and increase the likelihood of compliance. This should include CDC recommendations like frequent hand washing, keeping your hands away from your face, maintaining 6 feet of distance from others, frequent cleaning of surfaces after use and using a face and nose covering while inside the facility.

Ensure that cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer are readily available for staff and customers in multiple locations around the facility, especially in high use areas.

Consider requiring face masks of members and staff. Refer to local government mandates, as these may already be in place for your region.

Recommend members wash their hands upon entering and leaving the facility. Provide a hand sanitizing or hand washing station at the front door.

Liability

Are facility and exercise professional credentials and policies in place and current?

Risk management includes a review of staff credentials and training to determine whether employees are properly trained for the roles they perform. For example, do personal trainers and group exercise instructors hold current certifications? Have staff members been properly trained to screen visitors prior to entering the facility?

Will members be subject to revised member policies that require consent?

Insurance carriers and legal counsel can provide guidance on policy changes, including any new waiver requirements that may increase the safety of the facility and reduce the liability risk of the facility.

Has the insurance company been contacted regarding:

- Confirmation of coverage
- Conditions of coverage
- Exceptions

A policy review with your insurance agent is recommended to identify any gaps in coverage. Insurance carriers can advise on any additional coverage that should be considered to reduce the liability risk associated with COVID-19.