

FRAMEWORK OF OPERATIONS FOR FITNESS FACILITIES UNDER COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

Both staff and customer confidence and comfort is essential with their health and wellbeing of paramount importance. This framework is designed to provide guidance in managing risks associated with COVID-19 within fitness facilities in Australia. It provides recommendations that are evidence based and follow a risk-mitigation model. The framework also provides a number of protocols should community transmission risk rise and additional controls needed to be considered to keep fitness facilities open.

Fitness Australia is the peak industry body that represents almost 30,000 personal trainers, fitness instructors, fitness students and fitness business providers. Fitness Australia sets industry standards to ensure that safe and effective services are delivered to Australian communities to get more people, more active, more often for better health and quality of life.

Introduction

In accordance with the gradual easing of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, the government has provided recommendations for a staged return to fitness and leisure activities over the following months.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to Fitness Australia's business members on requirements for their staff and members to support a COVID safe workplace.

The framework aligns with public health and Safe Work Australia recommendations for workplaces. It has been developed by Fitness Australia through consultation with industry nationally and internationally (IHRSA, UK Active and Exercise New Zealand). Further to this, Fitness Australia has also utilised resources from both the Departments of Health and World Health Organisation to ensure that the guidelines within the framework reflect both national and international standards of practice. The framework has also been endorsed by industry leaders across the sector and Occupational and Environmental Physician Dr Andrea James MBBS FAFOE(RACP) FRACGP GDOEH.

Throughout the COVID-19 restrictions phase, fitness facilities in addition to the [National Fitness Industry Code of Practice](#), must align with best practice which includes the guidance provided in this framework.

This guidance document by Fitness Australia will be reviewed and updated regularly in accordance with public health and government legislation which takes precedence. This document will be reviewed by no later than June 30th 2020.

Key Public and Occupational Health Recommendations

Over the coming months, organisations will have an important role in reducing the rate of transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace and in the community. Minimising exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and supporting public health measures in contact tracing will reduce disruption to business in the long term.

The key recommendations by public health authorities to control the transmission of the coronavirus are:

1. Physical distancing
2. Practice good hand hygiene, clean and disinfect your environment
3. Stay at home if you are unwell and have any symptoms of the virus
4. Contact tracing

In addition to managing the risk of transmission of coronavirus within fitness facilities, employers and business operators have a responsibility to manage and care for the health and safety of their staff, which includes their physical and mental wellbeing.

Employers must consult with staff and their representatives (e.g. health and safety representatives) on health and safety matters relating to COVID-19, including what control measures to put in place in their workplace.

Employers must ensure all staff have completed the [Australian Government online COVID19 infection control training module](#).

Frequent communication (e.g. newsletters, posters, signage) with staff and members to reinforce all COVID-19 related policies and procedures will support effective action and enhance staff and member confidence in their ability to work and use the gym or fitness centre. Member gyms and fitness centres should be able and willing to present or display a copy of the facility's disease control policies and procedures when requested. It is advised that hard copies should not be released.

Reliable sources of additional information and references have been provided in the Appendix to this document.

1. Physical distancing

What physical distancing measures do I need to implement in my fitness facility?

Note - due to current restrictions on fitness facilities opening to the general public, any outlined measures relevant to the public facing areas or activities are only provided for the purpose of informing planning for when restrictions in the relevant state or territory are lifted. You should check what restrictions are in place in your state or territory and only operate based on what activities are permissible. This includes the number of people permissible in outdoor and indoor spaces related to your business.

In accordance with public health directives it is recommended that you minimise the number of people in an indoor space to one person per four square metres of floor space. This will allow all persons to maintain a physical distance of 1.5 metres from any other person whilst working or using fitness facilities. The same applies for outdoor areas.

To determine the maximum number of people allowed, including staff, in an indoor room at any one time calculate the area of the enclosed (indoor) space (length multiplied by width in metres) and divide by four.

To achieve physical distancing the following guidance is recommended.

For gym floor and change rooms:

Limit the number of staff and customers within the general gym floor, specific workout areas and change rooms by:

- ▶ restricting the number of customers allowed in specified areas;
- ▶ implementing 'fitness sessions' for particular areas with requirements for customers to register (ideally online) for specific sessions; and
- ▶ asking customers to leave the premises once they have completed their workout session.

Direct staff and customers to keep 1.5 metres of distance between people and:

- ▶ put signs around the gym floor including areas such as customer change rooms and create wall or floor markings to identify 1.5 metres distance. Staff could wear a badge as a visual reminder to each other and customers of physical distancing requirements;
- ▶ remove or cordon off common areas (i.e. chairs, tables lounges) where customers and staff may otherwise congregate;
- ▶ encourage staff to use other methods such as mobile phone or radio to communicate rather than face to face interaction e.g. staff on the gym floor who want to talk to reception; and
- ▶ if available within the gym use a speaker system to periodically remind customers about physical distancing at the gym.

The layout of the gym floor and specific workout areas should be reviewed to enable customers and staff to keep at least 1.5 metres apart while exercising. This can be achieved by:

- ▶ increasing spacing between fitness equipment. If this is not possible, consider disabling access to certain pieces of equipment to enable customers to maintain 1.5 meters between each other – e.g. restrict access to every second treadmill;
- ▶ creating specific pathways for entering and exiting areas using floor or wall markings;
- ▶ where possible encourage members to move uniformly (e.g. move in the same direction) throughout the fitness facility to reduce random movement on the gym floor;
- ▶ where available, utilising any outdoor space by relocating more readily moved equipment outside where weather permits, and it is safe to do so – e.g. stretching mats; and
- ▶ spreading out more popular equipment throughout the premises to better utilise less frequently used areas, where safe to do so – e.g. can treadmills lined up side by side be relocated.

If changing the physical layout of gym floor and specific workout areas, the revised layout must allow for staff and customers to enter, exit and move about both under normal working conditions and in an emergency without risks to their health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable.

Fitness facilities will require adequate supervision of physical distancing and cleaning requirements. This means that 24 hour fitness facilities should consider their operational arrangements to ensure they are aligned with these guidelines.

For Group fitness rooms and classes

As per the above recommendations physical distancing should be maintained by providing each person with 4 square metres of space in indoor areas and a minimum of 1.5 metres between people in outdoor areas. This may limit the number of people in a fitness room, which could be achieved by:

- ▶ staggering class session times and allowing for a minimum of 10 minutes between classes so there is no overlap between customers arriving and leaving;
- ▶ offering some group fitness classes online where possible;
- ▶ restricting the number of persons allowed per group fitness class based on the size of the room and the nature of the fitness activity; and
- ▶ asking customers to leave the premises once they have completed their session or class, or if they have exceeded a two hour period.

Direct staff and customers to keep 1.5 metres of distance between them which could be achieved by:

- ▶ using signage on walls to remind people of physical distancing;
- ▶ using marks on floors and walls to identify 1.5 metres distance;
- ▶ staff could wear a badge as a visual reminder to each other and customers of physical distancing requirements;
- ▶ ensure class participants are adequately spread out around the room – e.g. use floor markings to indicate areas/zones for each person to set up in or use; and
- ▶ staff using other methods such as mobile phone or radio to communicate rather than face to face interaction e.g. group fitness instructors who want to talk to reception.

To enable class participants and staff to keep at least 1.5 metres apart while exercising consider the following measures:

- ▶ increasing spacing between fitness equipment such as exercise bikes;
- ▶ creating specific pathways for entering and exiting the group fitness rooms, using floor or wall markings; and
- ▶ where appropriate, utilising available outdoor space for classes where weather permits and it is safe to do so.

If changing the physical layout of group fitness rooms, the revised layout must allow for staff and customers to enter, exit and move about both under normal working conditions and in an emergency without risks to their health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable.

Gym-based Personal Training

Direct personal trainers and clients to keep 1.5 metres of distance between each other during personal training sessions. To achieve the best outcomes for physical distancing:

- ▶ tailor sessions to include only exercises that do not require physical contact between the trainer and the client/s including setup and use of equipment;
- ▶ limit the number of clients per session. Where there are multiple clients ensure adequate spacing is maintained and provide each client with their own disinfected exercise equipment;
- ▶ where weather permits and it is safe to do so, utilise outdoor spaces at the gym or fitness centre where available; and
- ▶ in line with physical distance requirements, boxing pad work, sparring or like activities should not be conducted until jurisdictional regulations allow.

Staff gatherings and training

Postpone or cancel non-essential gatherings, meetings or training.

If gatherings, meetings or training are essential:

- ▶ use non face-to-face options to conduct – e.g. electronic communication such as tele and video conferencing;
- ▶ if a non face-to-face option is not possible, ensure face-to-face time is limited, that is make sure the gathering, meeting or training goes for no longer than it needs to;
- ▶ hold the gathering, meeting or training in spaces that enable staff to keep at least 1.5 metres apart and with 4 square metres of space per person – e.g. outdoors or in large conference rooms;
- ▶ limit the number of attendees in a gathering, meeting or training. This may require, for example, multiple training sessions to be held; and
- ▶ ensure adequate ventilation if held indoors.

Staff facilities

- ▶ Reduce the number of employees utilising staff common areas at a given time – e.g. by staggering meal breaks and start times.
- ▶ Spread out furniture in common areas. If changing the physical layout of the workplace, the revised layout must allow for staff to enter, exit and move about the workplace both under normal working conditions and in an emergency without risks to their health and safety so far as is reasonably practicable.
- ▶ Ensure staff maintain 1.5 metres distance when travelling in lifts. Depending on the size of the lift, this may result in only one person travelling in a lift at any one time.
- ▶ Place signage about physical distancing around the workplace. Safe Work Australia and Fitness Australia have links to a range of [posters and resources](#) to help remind staff and others of the risks of COVID-19 and the measures that are necessary to stop its spread. These posters can be placed around the workplace and in customer-facing work environments (e.g. workplace entrances). Consideration needs to be given to how to communicate with staff and others for who English is not their first language.

Deliveries, contractors and visitors attending the workplace

- ▶ Non-essential visits to the workplace should be cancelled or postponed.
- ▶ Minimise the number of staff attending to deliveries and contractors.
- ▶ Delivery drivers and other contractors who need to attend the workplace, to provide maintenance or repair services or perform other essential activities, should be given clear instructions of physical distancing requirements while on site.
- ▶ Ensure handwashing facilities, or if not possible, alcohol-based hand sanitiser is readily available for staff after physically handling deliveries.
- ▶ Direct visiting delivery drivers and contractors to remain in vehicles and use contactless methods such as mobile phones to communicate with staff wherever possible.
- ▶ Direct visiting delivery drivers and contractors to use alcohol-based hand sanitiser before handling products being delivered.
- ▶ Use, and ask delivery drivers and contractors to use, electronic paperwork where possible, to minimise physical interaction. Where possible, set up alternatives to requiring signatures. For instance, a confirmation email or a photo of the loaded or unloaded goods may be accepted as proof of delivery or collection (as applicable). If a pen or other utensil is required for signature, ideally use your own pen or ask that the pen or utensil is cleaned or sanitised before use.

On-going review and monitoring

If physical distancing measures introduce new health and safety risks (e.g. because they impact communication or mean that less people are doing a task), these risks also need to be managed. Put processes in place to regularly monitor and review the implementation of physical distancing measures to ensure they are being followed and remain effective.

2. Hygiene – cleaning and disinfecting

What cleaning and hygiene measures do I need to implement in my fitness facility?

Personal hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting is a public health recommendation to minimise the transmission of the virus. The virus can be transmitted from the environment to people when they touch infected items and then touch their mouth, nose and eyes.

Frequent washing of hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser (minimum 60% ethanol), regular cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and items handled by multiple people will reduce transmission of the virus in your workplace.

To achieve effective hygiene in the workplace the following guidance is recommended.

All fitness facilities will require regular cleaning per Safe Work Australia recommendations for cleaning of workplaces:

- ▶ Workplaces must be cleaned at least daily and recorded.
- ▶ Cleaning with detergent and water is sufficient.
- ▶ Alternatively, you may be able to do a 2-in-1 clean and disinfection by using a combined detergent and disinfectant.
- ▶ Following cleaning hard surfaces can be disinfected with a disinfectant containing $\geq 70\%$ alcohol, quaternary ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces.
- ▶ More frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are frequently handled by multiple people such as doorknobs, swipe machines and gym equipment is recommended.
- ▶ Additional information on [cleaning and disinfecting of workplaces](#) is available via the Safe Work Australia website.

To enable efficient management of hygiene requirements, fitness facilities may wish to consider closing unnecessary facilities such as saunas, spas and limit showers and change areas.

For staff

- ▶ Develop infection control policies in consultation with staff. These policies should outline measures in place to prevent the spread of infectious diseases at the workplace. Communicate these policies to staff.
- ▶ Train staff on the correct infection control procedures including the importance of washing their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and drying them correctly, or appropriate use of an alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before entering and exiting a common area.
- ▶ Place posters near handwashing facilities showing how to correctly wash and dry hands and clean hands with sanitiser.
- ▶ Inform staff of workplace hygiene standards that are expected when utilizing common areas (cleaning up after yourself, placing rubbish in bins provided, avoiding putting items such as phones on meal surfaces, etc.).
- ▶ Consult with your staff to determine responsibilities for cleaning and disinfecting of the workplace during operational hours.
- ▶ Ensure sufficient time for shared equipment used in group fitness classes to be wiped down by members before the next class.
- ▶ Establish a protocol to regularly remind members and staff about hygiene in the gym/ fitness center (e.g. regular reminders over the loud speaker, newsletters and signage); staff to politely request members to wipe equipment if observed not do so.
- ▶ Staff training in how to communicate these policies and procedures to members is required, which should include the specific words to be used by staff in the fitness facility.
- ▶ Where staff are provided with personal protective equipment they should be trained in its correct use. Disposable gloves are required for cleaning tasks. Face masks are not generally required unless physical distancing cannot be maintained.

For gym/fitness club members

- ▶ Inform customers of hygiene standards that are expected when they use the fitness facility with signs at the entrance and throughout the facility and notices on your website and on social media. This may include:
 - washing their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser upon arrival;
 - disinfectant wipe down of exercise equipment before and after use;
 - using a clean towel each time they attend their session or class;

- bringing extra towels to lay on equipment benches and seats (consider any safety risks that may arise from this); and
- require them to bring their own drink bottles to use instead of water fountains.
- ▶ Encourage contactless payment or sign-in where possible.
- ▶ Provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser in appropriate locations for patrons to use, such as entry and exit points.
- ▶ Provide an adequate supply of disinfectant wipes or disinfecting solutions and disposable paper towel for customers to wipe down exercise equipment before and after use.
- ▶ Locate equipment sanitizing materials in a location visible and easily accessible to the equipment.
- ▶ Provide bins lined with a plastic liner for disposal of wipes and used paper towel. Bins should be regularly emptied to ensure they are not overflowing.
- ▶ Close shared hydration stations which dispense water for drinking directly (water bubblers) and encourage members to bring their own water bottle.

Waste management procedures

Public health authorities and waste management services have advised that normal waste management procedures for worksites can be utilized with the addition of:

- ▶ Lining all bins with a plastic bin liner bag which ideally can be tied at the top.
- ▶ All disposable tissues, paper towel and cleaning materials are to be placed in a bin immediately after use and not left on surfaces.
- ▶ Regular emptying of bins inside the workplace to avoid overflow onto surfaces.
- ▶ When emptying bins staff should wear gloves and dispose of the gloves into a bin after use. Face masks are not required.
- ▶ Bags of rubbish which contain materials used to clean, disinfect or tissues etc. are to be placed in a second plastic bag prior to placing in larger bins for removal as per usual waste management.

You may wish to consult with your regular waste management service to confirm their requirements.

On-going review and monitoring

Regularly monitor and review the implementation of hygiene measures to ensure they are being followed and remain effective.

3. Stay at home if unwell

What do I need to do in relation to people with or suspected of having COVID-19?

Public health authorities advise all people to stay at home if they are unwell or display any symptoms of COVID-19 infection. People are advised to seek medical advice and testing for COVID-19 if they suspect they have the infection. For fitness facilities, it is recommended that the **'Stay at home if unwell'** message is communicated to all staff and members via signage, newsletters and staff meetings.

For Staff

Staff should be informed:

- ▶ they must not attend work if they have symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, fever, sore throat, shortness of breath and fatigue), or suspect they may have been infected with COVID-19 (this includes close contact with another person diagnosed with COVID-19);
- ▶ of the business's leave policy for COVID-19 related absences; and
- ▶ how and to whom they communicate a COVID-19 sickness absence.

Note: the majority of suspected cases of COVID-19 are likely to be negative. However, all persons who have been tested for COVID-19 must self isolate until they receive their results from health authorities which may take up to 5 days.

If a staff member is noted to be unwell at work with symptoms of COVID-19, you must ask them to leave work immediately and advise them to seek medical advice. Staff who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 will be quarantined by health authorities until they are cleared from the virus. This will be managed by health authorities. Once an employee has recovered from the virus and is cleared by health authorities they can return to work as usual.

Managers should consider how they will manage staff rosters to ensure sufficient staff to cover for staff absences at short notice and for the length of any isolation requirements.

If a member of your staff tests positive for COVID-19 you will be contacted by public health authorities who will advise you of the steps required to manage your worksite.

Vulnerable workers

Vulnerable workers are staff who are at increased risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions; people 65 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions; people 70 years and older, and people with compromised immune systems.

Staff should be encouraged to advise you if they are a vulnerable worker so that steps can be taken to minimise the risk of infection with coronavirus in the workplace. This may include modifying duties where reasonably practicable to reduce exposure to customers or approving leave. It is recommended that each case be managed on a case by case basis, undertaking a risk assessment of the person's job and work environment, maintaining the privacy of employees and avoiding discriminatory actions. Staff members should be treated with compassion and understanding.

It is reasonable to request a medical certificate from their doctor if an employee advises they are a vulnerable person. The certificate should indicate work capacity (i.e. fit for modified duties or absence recommended) and the period of time of the certification. If additional assistance is required to manage a vulnerable worker at work, an [Occupational Physician](#) could be consulted.

For Members

All members should be advised that they must not attend the fitness facility if they are unwell, have symptoms of COVID-19, suspect they may have been infected with COVID-19 (including close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19) or been advised by health authorities to self isolate. This message should be regularly communicated to members via newsletters and signage.

A member who is observed to be reasonably displaying symptoms (for example persistent coughing) of COVID-19 in a fitness facility should be politely asked to leave the site.

Fitness facility members who are vulnerable to a serious COVID-19 infection should discuss with their doctor what activities it is safe for them to resume once restrictions are eased. The onus is on the member to determine their capacity to safely resume fitness activities and attendance at fitness facilities.

4. Contact Tracing

What is my role in contact tracing?

A key component of managing the COVID-19 pandemic and reducing transmission of infection in the community, is rapid and effective contact tracing. Contact tracing is undertaken by public health authorities.

To support public health authorities with contact tracing all fitness facilities must:

- ▶ maintain a Register of Attendance (sign-in) either digitally or manually of all persons on their site
- ▶ establish protocols for providing government authorities with member access logs and permitted contact details for the purposes of contact-tracing with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19

Fitness Australia endorses the Australian Government's COVID Safe App.

5. Employer's duty of care

During the COVID-19 pandemic employers have a duty of care to the health and wellbeing of their staff and the community whilst operating their businesses. The impact of COVID-19 on the Australian community will evolve and change over time and with that the requirements for how the fitness industry will operate.

Employers are advised to:

- ▶ maintain effective, two-way communication with their staff;
- ▶ consider the impact of decisions they make in relation to COVID-19, on the physical and mental health of their staff;
- ▶ consider innovative solutions so that their workplace can remain safely operational and staff can remain in their roles as far as possible; and
- ▶ plan ahead and be flexible to accommodate the changing nature of the pandemic.

6. Resources and References

- ▶ [Safe Work Australia's COVID19 information](#)
- ▶ [Australian Government Coronavirus Advice](#)
- ▶ [Beyond Blue](#)

Note:

It is outside the scope of Fitness Australia to comment or make recommendations for the following services that may be present within a fitness facility:

- ▶ Swimming pools and wet areas
- ▶ Sporting courts and facilities
- ▶ Childcare facilities
- ▶ Cafes
- ▶ Retail facilities.

Operation of these services must be in line with specific recommendations and directives from relevant state, territories, and federal authorities.



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