

23 October 2020

# COVID-19 Guidance for Gyms

**We have developed this guidance to help create a safe environment for gyms in NSW.**

Gyms in NSW are required to develop and register a COVID-19 Safety Plan, which outlines measures to promote the wellbeing of staff and patrons, physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning, and good record keeping.

This guidance aims to support gym owners, operators, and COVID-19 Safe Hygiene Marshals in gyms to understand and address the key COVID-19 risks in gym settings.

Further resources and guidance on how to complete a COVID-19 Safety Plan, register and stay in business is available: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/covid-safe/gyms>

## About COVID-19 and Gyms

Transmission of COVID-19 in gyms has occurred in NSW. Transmission of COVID-19 mainly occurs during close contact between people through respiratory droplets produced by infectious people. COVID-19 transmission can also occur through touching contaminated objects.

Investigations conducted by NSW Health and international research suggest the key risks in gym settings are:

- High intensity activities such as weightlifting, dancing (particularly Zumba or similar classes), spin class and cardio machines, that increase respiratory breathing and exhalation of air, increasing the distance that droplets may travel.
- Close contact between patrons, sharing of equipment, and contamination of common high-touch surfaces.
- Activities such as spotting (in weightlifting), which require close contact between individuals.

## What is COVID-19 and how is it transmitted?

COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. It has been declared a global pandemic. There is much more to learn about how COVID-19 is spread, its severity, and other features associated with the virus. Epidemiological and clinical investigations are ongoing in Australia and around the world.

The virus can spread from person to person through:

- close contact with an infectious person (including in the 48 hours before they had symptoms)
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or gym equipment) that have droplets from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.

Research, including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus, indicates that coronaviruses may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

As COVID-19 is a new disease, there is no existing immunity in our community. This means that COVID-19 can spread widely and quickly.

## Wellbeing of Staff and Visitors

### The importance of excluding staff, volunteers and visitors who are unwell

To help prevent transmission, it is essential to remind staff, volunteers and visitors who are unwell not to attend the gym and to get tested for COVID-19.

### Signs and symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- fever (37.5° or higher)
- cough
- sore throat
- shortness of breath (difficulty breathing)
- runny nose
- loss of taste
- loss of smell.

Other reported symptoms of COVID-19 include fatigue, muscle pain, joint pain, headache, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting and loss of appetite. Unexplained chest pain and conjunctivitis have also been reported as symptoms of COVID-19. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia with severe acute respiratory distress.

Illness can be mild, so even people with only one symptom should get tested and self-isolate straight away until they receive a negative result. Most people in NSW receive their test result within 24 hours.

The time between when a person is exposed to the virus and when symptoms first appear is typically 5 to 6 days, although may range from 2 to 14 days. For this reason, people who have been in contact with a confirmed case are asked to self-isolate for 14 days to ensure the NSW community is protected.

### COVID-19 Marshals

Having a COVID-19 Marshal onsite is important to supervise physical distancing and cleaning at the gym, and to ensure the accuracy of record keeping. This needs to be a person who has the authority and time to implement the COVID-19 Safety Plan.

Gyms are required to have at least one COVID-19 Marshal in distinctive clothing when there are more than 20 people onsite (excluding staff). It is important to have a system in place to ensure there are not more than 20 people onsite when the COVID-19 Marshal is not present. Where practicable, gyms are encouraged to also have a COVID-19 Marshal onsite when there are 20 or fewer patrons onsite.

COVID-19 Marshals have the authority to:

- Ask people to move 1.5 metres apart.
- Manage the number of patrons in various areas of the gym.
- Request patrons to clean equipment.
- Exclude people from the gym or ask them to leave if they are displaying COVID-19 symptoms.

It is strongly recommended all gym staff complete the COVID-19 Safety in Gyms module on the NSW Government website, particularly those performing the role of COVID-19 Marshal. It is anticipated this module will be available from early November.

## Physical Distancing

### Capacity in gyms

- Ensure the number of people in the gym does not exceed one person per 4 square metres of space (excluding staff).
- Ensure gym or recreation classes or sport activities have no more than 20 participants (excluding the instructor and assistants) and comply with one participant per 4 square metres. There may be multiple classes in a room if there is sufficient space to accommodate this, and if the classes remain separate with start and end times staggered to minimise crowding.

### 1.5 metres physical distance

- Ensure patrons or groups of patrons practice physical distancing by staying 1.5 metres away from people they don't live with.
- Position equipment with adequate space (at least 1.5 metres) between stations and so that patrons are not facing each other when using equipment stations.
- Appropriate spacing (at least 1.5 metres) should be maintained even when Perspex or other screening has been installed between equipment stations.
- To decrease risk further, 2 or 3 metres of spacing between aerobic stations/activities could be implemented.
- Ensure class instructors are at least 1.5 metres from class members and use a microphone and amplifier to avoid yelling instructions.

### Spacing in high use areas

Manage the number of patrons allowed at any one time in high traffic areas, such as:

- Change rooms.
- Weights and cardio areas where there is an increased rate of exhalation.

Ensure that at least 1.5 metres distance can be maintained between patrons. This is particularly important during peak times.

## Hygiene and Cleaning

### Cleaning guidelines

Cleaning is vital to prevent transmission of COVID-19 through contaminated equipment and areas. Given the high usage and turnover of patrons in gyms, frequent cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces is strongly recommended.

As part of a comprehensive cleaning routine, you should:

- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces that many people touch such as door handles, stair rails, water stations, bathroom amenities and storage units such as lockers. At a minimum, frequently touched surfaces in gyms should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice daily.
- Shared gym equipment should be cleaned between users.
- Consider taking commonly used items (mats, individual weights) out of circulation and cleaning them systematically at least twice a day.
- Educate all staff on the importance of cleaning and correct cleaning techniques, including ensuring that correct chemicals are used at an appropriate strength and in line with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Instruct patrons to clean equipment after each use.
- Provide patrons with access to cleaning/disinfection wipes to facilitate cleaning and wiping down of equipment between use. Supervise consistent and correct use.

- Increase the availability of hand sanitiser and monitor patrons using it between each piece of equipment.
- Consider requiring gym patrons to use towels as a condition of using the gym.

#### Resources:

- NSW CEC Guidance 'Cleaning for Workplaces':  
[http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/587164/COVID-19-Infection-Prevention-and-Control-Advice-on-Cleaning-and-Disinfection-in-the-Workplace.pdf](http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/587164/COVID-19-Infection-Prevention-and-Control-Advice-on-Cleaning-and-Disinfection-in-the-Workplace.pdf)
- SafeWork Australia - Gyms and Fitness Centre Cleaning:  
<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/gyms-and-fitness-centres/cleaning>
- SafeWork Australia - Supplementary Information:  
<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/cleaning-table-covid19-2september2020.pdf>

#### Ventilation in the gym

Gyms should ensure proper ventilation to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Some strategies to achieve this include:

- Using outdoor settings where possible.
- Opening windows to increase natural ventilation, where possible.
- Regularly inspecting, maintaining and cleaning the gym's heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems.
- Assessing and adjusting the level of air circulation in the gym (one option is to use a CO<sub>2</sub> monitor especially in smaller, more confined areas of the gym).
- Directing fans towards the ceiling or floor so they are not blowing air from patron to patron.
- Increasing the airflow from outdoors to indoors, where possible – e.g. consider running mechanical air systems at maximum outside airflow for 2 hours before and after spaces are occupied.
- Disable ventilation controls with automated settings that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy.

### Record Keeping

#### Supporting Contact Tracing

- Make sure sign in and sign out times are recorded electronically (e.g. QR code or swipe card). For further information on QR codes see <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/covid-safe/gr-codes>
- Review sign in and out processes to ensure records will be complete. This may require limiting points of entry and exit to the facility. Rapid and complete contact tracing facilitates a quick return to normal business operations. Delays in contact tracing can delay reopening until all necessary contacts are made.
- Have a floor plan for your gym with clearly marked activity zones. This supports more accurate and precise identification of patrons' locations if contact tracing is required. Contact tracing in a gym needs to identify all people present in the same area as the infectious person, and so having identifiable zones may decrease the number of people required to isolate.
- Archived CCTV footage may also assist contact tracing.

### Further information

- CDC Guidance for Gym and Fitness Centre Employees:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/gym-employees.html>
- World Health Organisation Guidance for Ventilation:  
<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-ventilation-and-air-conditioning-and-covid-19>