

Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control | BC Ministry of Health



Public Health Guidelines for Group Low Intensity Exercise

These guidelines are intended for fitness centres, studios, recreation centres, gyms and other settings which host indoor group exercise. They are based on evidence as of December 14, 2020.

Current Public Health Orders Impacting Fitness Centres, Studios, and Gyms

The Provincial Health Officer [Gatherings and Events Order](#) prohibits indoor group high intensity exercise and group low intensity exercise:

- **Indoor group low intensity exercise may resume with an updated [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) in accordance with the measures provided below**, and if the COVID-19 Safety Plan has been posted in a place easily visible to participants
- **Indoor group high intensity exercise is not permitted at this time**

Definitions

- **Indoor:** Any enclosed communal space
- **Exercise:** A subset of physical activity that is designed to maintain or improve health status and/or physical fitness
- **Physical fitness:** A set of attributes that are either health or skill-related i.e. attributes that can be tested such as power, VO₂max, heart rate, etc.
- **Group exercise:** exercise in a communal setting where patrons arrive and leave at the same time and follow a set exercise routine simultaneously, often with an instructor
- **Low intensity exercise:** Any exercise that does not result in significantly increased respiration rates
- **High intensity exercise:** Any exercise that results in significantly increased respiration rates

Scope of Guidelines

This document provides guidelines for fitness centres, studios, recreation centres, and gyms that provide group low intensity exercise classes. **Martial Arts, Cheerleading, & Gymnastics** studios are not covered by these guidelines as these activities are governed under provincial and local sport organizations and must follow current Provincial Health Officer orders and Public Health guidance related to sport as well as [viaSport's Return to Sport Guidelines](#). Public **Skating Rinks** and **Swimming Pools** are also not covered by these guidelines.

Introduction

This document provides guidelines for fitness centres, studios, recreation centres, and gyms to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and maintain safe and healthy environments for those participating in group low intensity exercise. It identifies key infection prevention and exposure control practices to implement in these settings.

The risk for COVID-19 transmission in these settings is potentially high, because evidence shows that COVID-19 is more easily transmitted under the following circumstances:

- When people are exercising; especially when they are:
 - Breathing more deeply and quickly

If you have fever, a new cough, or are having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.



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- Moving around in a confined space in groups or mixing with others in the space
- Indoors, especially in spaces with limited ventilation and where physical distancing cannot be maintained
- In spaces where people gather in groups and are speaking loudly or shouting

Because community levels of COVID-19 risk will change over time in the province, the risk of cases or clusters in fitness centres, studios and gyms may increase or decrease in future. These guidelines will be updated as the pandemic evolves.

For up-to-date information on COVID-19, visit the [BCCDC Website](#).

COVID-19 and Exercise

Regular exercise is important for promoting and maintaining physical and mental health. Benefits include prevention of the onset of chronic disease, promotion of positive mental health and cognition, and reduction of social isolation.

When community levels of COVID-19 are high, indoor exercise has been identified as higher risk activities for virus transmission, especially in communal settings with reduced ventilation (e.g. hot yoga) and during participation in high intensity activities (e.g. spin classes) or other physical activities where physical distancing cannot be maintained. From experiences in B.C., the transmission of COVID-19 in these settings has been primarily from groups gathering without adequate physical distance before, during, or after the activity. This is the rationale behind many of the Provincial Health Officer orders aimed at reducing group activities or those that have the potential for group gatherings where appropriate physical distancing is not maintained.

High vs. Low Intensity Exercise

There is no evidence-based consensus on what differentiates high intensity vs. low intensity group exercise, especially as it relates to the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Separating out activities into specific categories of risk is also challenging because an activity that may be “high intensity” for one individual may be considered “low intensity” for another, depending on their physical fitness.

For the purposes of these guidelines, **exercise that generally results in significantly increased respiration rates is considered high intensity, while exercise that does not result in significantly increased respiration rates is considered low intensity.** While it is recognized this is a broad definition, the overarching intent is to support people to participate in important health-promoting activities while reducing COVID-19 transmission risk. In general, high intensity exercise (especially in groups or communal spaces) leads to greater risk of COVID-19 transmission than low intensity exercise.

Examples*:

Low Intensity	High Intensity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Barre (lower intensity classes) ● Exercise machines/cardio equipment (low intensity) ● Light weightlifting ● Pilates (lower intensity classes) ● Stretching ● Tai-Chi ● Yoga (hatha) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aerobics ● Barre (high intensity/cardio classes) ● Bootcamp ● Bodybuilding / Heavy Weightlifting ● Circuit training ● CrossFit (high intensity activities/classes) ● Dance classes ● Dance fitness (Zumba and similar) ● Exercise machines/cardio equipment (high intensity) ● High-intensity interval training (HIIT) ● Kickboxing (Tai Bo and similar) ● Spin ● Yoga (power)

**This is not an exhaustive list. Gym, studio, and fitness centre operators should use best judgement in identifying what category their group exercise classes fall into based on these examples.*



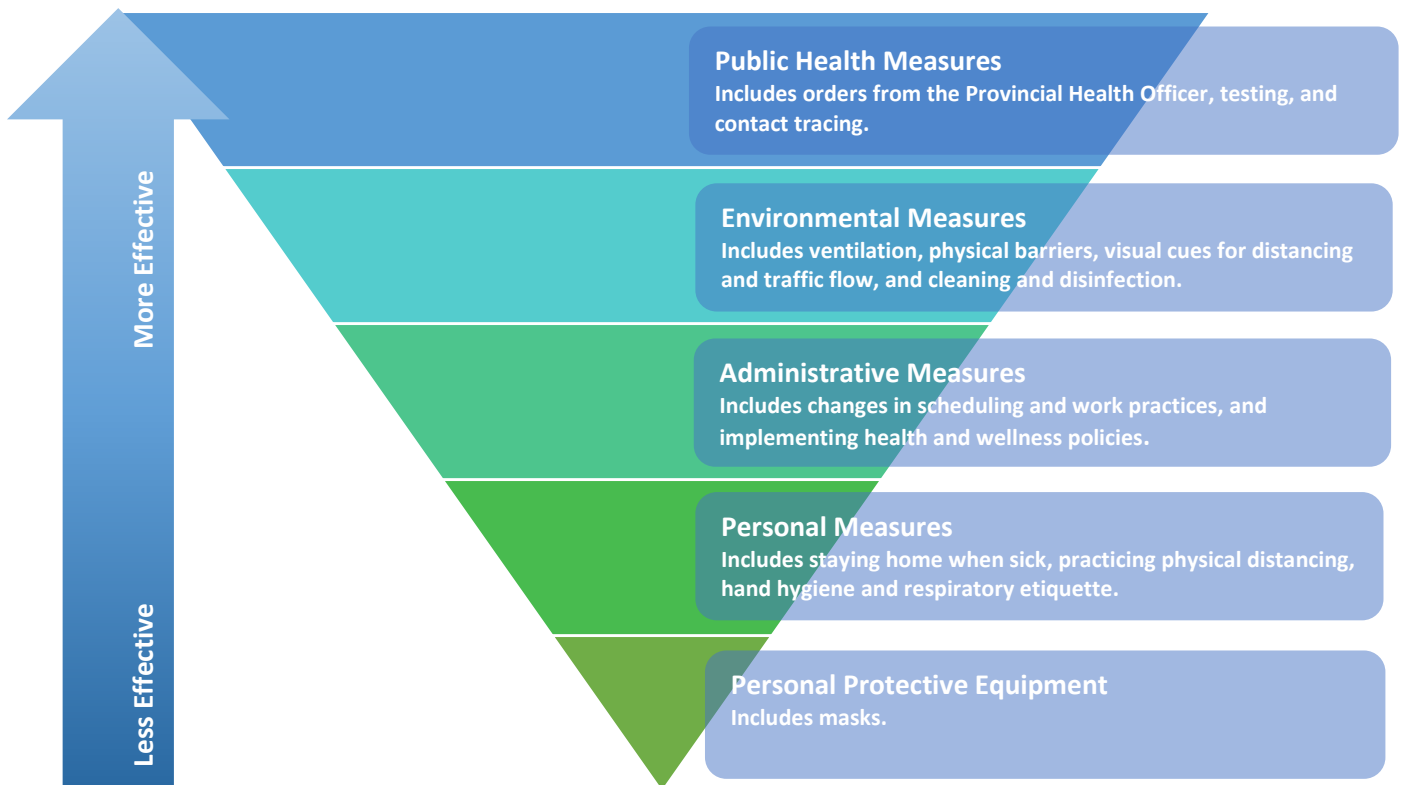
HOW TO USE THESE GUIDELINES:

When preparing a revised COVID-19 safety plan, consult the guidelines and checklists below. These are organized by levels of control with subheadings for specific areas of concern.

Levels of Control

In the model shown below, control measures at the top are more effective and protective than those at the bottom. By implementing a combination of measures at each level, the risk of COVID-19 is substantially reduced.

The Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures for Communicable Disease



Public Health Measures

Case Finding and Contact Tracing

- Contact information (name and phone number or e-mail) of staff and participant attendance kept in a format that can be made readily available if needed by Public Health.
 - Operators should keep contact information available for up to 30 days.



Environmental Measures

Environmental measures are changes to the physical environment that reduce the risk of exposure, such as increasing ventilation, and frequent cleaning and disinfection.

Ventilation

- ❑ **Creation of intentionally overheated exercise environments (e.g. for hot yoga) is prohibited**
- ❑ Outer doors and windows left open or partially open at all times (if possible)
- ❑ All mechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are working properly
- ❑ Fresh air intake on ventilation systems has been increased as much as possible
- ❑ All use of floor and wall fans discontinued

For more information, see WorkSafeBC guidance on [general ventilation and air circulation](#)

Floor Markings and Reducing Group Congregating

- ❑ Any group classes or bookings where a cohort of patrons are arriving at the same time must include at least 5 minutes before and 5 minutes after the class/booking time to reduce bottlenecking
 - For example, a 45-minute group class would be 35 minutes of exercise, with 5 minutes for staggered arrival and 5 minutes for staggered exit (additional time between classes is also required for cleaning and ventilation, see Booking and Registration section, below)
 - Additional time may be required for larger classes or to reduce the potential of gathering in common spaces
- ❑ Designate different doorways for entrance and exit if possible, or create a different process so patrons are not entering and exiting simultaneously at the same time
- ❑ Changerooms and showers must be closed; ensure patrons are aware that they should arrive in exercise attire
 - Washrooms should remain open; where washrooms are located within a change rooms, ensure there is signage and communication that these areas are for washroom use only
- ❑ Use floor markings and/or physical barriers to direct flow through the space and ensure 2 metres physical distancing can be maintained at all times
- ❑ Assign staff to ensure no groups are congregating
- ❑ Post signage to indicate how these rules should be followed

Cleaning and Disinfection

- ❑ All shared equipment (e.g. the barre in a Barre class, floor mats, weights, etc.) must be cleaned and disinfected between each use
- ❑ Other high touch surfaces (e.g. door handles, sink faucets, etc.) must be cleaned and disinfected twice per day
- ❑ Where exercise activities involve participants prone or seated on the floor (i.e. floor mats not used), the floor should be cleaned and disinfected between each class

Physical Barriers

- ❑ Physical barriers between exercise equipment or stations may be used as an additional safety measure, although use of physical barriers does not alter the physical distancing or occupancy requirements listed below. More information on using effective physical barriers can be found on [WorkSafeBC](#).



Administrative Measures

Administrative measures include the implementation of policies, procedures, training and education that reduce the risk of exposure.

Occupancy

- To determine overall occupancy: each workout room/space must have at least 7m² (2.5m x 2.5m plus a safety allowance of 20%) of unencumbered useable floor space per patron/staff who will be in the space during an exercise class, with a maximum of 25 patrons/staff in any exercise class or room (regardless of the space above)
 - For example, an exercise room that has 140m² (~1500ft²) of useable floor space would be able to accommodate: (140m² / 7m²) = 19 people
- Post signage with occupancy limits for each room so staff and patrons are aware and ensure that capacity is not exceeded

Physical Distancing and Minimizing Physical Contact

- Physical distance of **2.5 metres** between each patron in all directions at all times must be maintained **while exercising**:
 - Exercise machines must be appropriately spaced or blocked off to accommodate
 - Floor markings/signage should be used to identify exercise space
 - If there is movement occurring in a class, each patron should have enough space to ensure they are never within 2.5 metres of each other
- Instructors should remain in a designated “instructor area” throughout the class where they can maintain 2.5 m physical distance
 - Instructors must give verbal rather than hands-on corrections for yoga/barre/Pilates, etc.
- Physical distancing of **2 metres** must be maintained **when not exercising** and at all other times in facility

Booking and Registration

- All patrons must be scheduled in advance, no drop-ins allowed
 - Inform clients when they book an appointment that they should not come if they are feeling sick, and must cancel if they are feeling unwell
 - Change cancellation policy to allow for cancellations with no penalty if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms
- There must be at least 10 minutes between classes where no patrons are in the space
 - *Example Schedule:* 9:00-9:05– staggered entrance for Class 1; 9:05-9:45 – low intensity exercise Class 1; 9:45-9:50 – staggered exit for Class 1; 9:50-10:00 – cleaning and no patrons in space; 10:00-10:05– staggered entrance for Class 2.
 - Smaller studio spaces or those with lower ceilings or fewer windows/natural air intake are encouraged to allow even greater time between classes
- Ask that patrons do not arrive earlier than their scheduled arrival time
- All patrons have read and agree to follow safety protocols

Audio

- Instructors for exercise classes require microphones so that they are not required to raise their voices beyond a normal speaking volume. Microphones must be only used by one individual or covered for use
- Music must be kept below speaking volume in order to reduce singing or shouting; individuals may listen to music with headphones but are required to take headphones off when communicating with another patron/staff/instructor/trainer



Food and Beverages

- ❑ Patrons must bring or use a personal water bottle; water filling stations can be provided, but water fountains for drinking should be shut off
- ❑ No food or beverages may be sold on site

Staying Home When Sick and When New Symptoms Develop

- ❑ Policies established to ensure employees complete daily entry requirements
- ❑ Policies established to ensure employees can stay home when they have symptoms of COVID-19
- ❑ Policies established for employees or patrons showing symptoms of COVID-19 when inside the facility

Personal Measures

Personal measures are actions individuals can take to protect themselves and others. Examples include physical distancing, minimizing physical contact, frequent hand washing, practicing respiratory etiquette and staying home if sick.

COVID-19 Health Check

- ❑ Employees must complete daily entry requirements before entering the facility as per the [WorkSafeBC employer requirement](#)
- ❑ Patrons must complete daily entry requirements before entering the facility (e.g. [Entry Check for Visitors](#))

Exercise Attire / Personal Equipment

- ❑ Patrons are expected to arrive in exercise attire as change rooms will be closed
- ❑ Where practical, patrons should bring as much of their own equipment as possible (e.g. exercise mats, weights, etc.)

Hand Hygiene

- ❑ Instruct patrons to practice hand hygiene before and after a workout; supplies should be provided throughout the facility
- ❑ Make sure used tissues and disinfectant wipe are properly disposed of in a lined waste bin that is emptied at least daily

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Masks

- ❑ Masks must be worn at all times when not exercising
- ❑ Masks can be encouraged to be worn during exercise, but not required
- ❑ Instructors must wear masks at all times unless they are exercising or are in the 2.5m x 2.5m “instructor area”
- ❑ People who are unable to wear a mask due to a health condition or a physical, cognitive or mental impairment, and people who are unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person are exempt from mask requirements. People who are unable to wear a mask must maintain at least 2 metres distance at all times when in the facility

