



Interim Guidance: Indoor Gyms and Fitness Centers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

September 16, 2020

The following guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH) for use by Gyms and Fitness Centers and will be posted at www.sfdph.org/directives. This guidance may change as information is updated.

AUDIENCE: Gyms and Fitness Centers operating indoors and their patrons. Patrons of Gyms and Fitness Centers should read this because it conveys the risks associated with indoor exercise and relays best practices to help keep patrons and personnel healthy and safe.

BACKGROUND: Gyms and Fitness Centers are allowed to open indoors on a limited basis and with modified operations. Gyms and Fitness Centers can open up to a MAXIMUM 10% capacity based on established occupancy regulations. Gyms and Fitness Centers are required to adhere to these guidelines and must monitor forthcoming Health Directives which are posted at <http://www.sfdph.org/directives>.

KEY POINTS

- The number of people inside a gym must **never exceed 10% of the capacity** of that gym or fitness center, including personnel.
- Exercise increases the rate and intensity of exhalation. Because this increases the risk of viral transmission, **at least 12 feet of distance must be maintained around those who are performing any physical activity that increases breathing rate or intensity**. The greater the distance, the safer, especially if you or those around you are breathing heavily.
- Personnel and patrons must maintain **at least six feet of distance** at all times from those who are not performing exercise that increases breathing rate or intensity.
- **Face coverings are mandatory at all times** except while hydrating with normal breathing intensity.
- Keep the space clean with enhanced disinfecting and sanitation procedures.
- No one under 18 is permitted.

Exercising increases rate and intensity of exhalation and the risk of viral transmission. Indoor activities with people outside of your household have a much higher risk of COVID-19 transmission to you and your community than outdoor activities. You must consider the impact of this increased risk on yourself and your community. **Physical distancing, face coverings, and disinfection of the physical space and hands are critical to slowing the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 – especially in higher risk settings and situations such as indoor gyms and fitness centers where people are breathing more heavily.**

For ANY activity that may increase breathing rate and/or intensity (including but not limited to cardio/aerobic activities or weight-lifting, facilities must ensure individuals are **at least 12 feet apart**



from all others while engaging in those activities. The greater the space between patrons who are breathing heavily, the safer. Maintain at least six feet distance for stationary activities that do not increase breathing rate or intensity, such as stretching, gentle yoga or meditation.

Gyms and Fitness Centers are strongly encouraged to prioritize and use outdoor space whenever feasible (see [Tip Sheet for Outdoor Gym Services](#)) and may use outdoor AND indoor space as conditions allow under the current Directive.

Fitness Centers and Gyms are allowed to open at up to 10% capacity and must adhere to the requirements relayed in this guidance.

PLANNING

- Fill out the **Health and Safety Plan** (see Exhibit B, below) outlining what the facility will do to implement the requirements in this guidance and any relevant Health Officer Directives or Orders. Share this plan with personnel, patrons, and other members of the facility.
- Post the Health and Safety Plan in a highly visible location for personnel and patrons.
 - All mention of “personnel” shall include but is not limited to salaried and hourly staff and independent vendors and contractors.
- Prepare and post the Social Distancing Protocol (see Appendix A of the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order, posted at www.sfdph.org/healthorders).
- Designate a COVID-19 staff liaison to be the single point of contact at each site for questions or concerns around practices, protocols, or potential exposure. This person will also serve as a liaison to SFDPH.
- It is strongly recommended that a reservation system be established to manage capacity for gym access and high-use equipment. Facilities should determine in advance how they will monitor in real time the capacity inside the facility and the steps to be taken to make sure it is not exceeded.
- Equip the front desk area with Plexiglas or other impermeable barriers, if feasible, to minimize the interaction between reception workers and patrons.
 - Implement virtual, touchless check-in tools, if possible, so that patrons do not have to utilize the reception space.
- Train staff on health and safety practices that must be followed.
 - Share information on [COVID-19, how to prevent it from spreading](#), and which [underlying health conditions](#) may make individuals more susceptible to contracting the virus.
 - All personnel must wear face coverings AT ALL TIMES while in the gym and/or fitness center. [See the Face Covering Health Order No. C19-12c](#).
 - All personnel must be screened prior to entering the facility every day. See www.sfdcp.org/screening-handout.
 - All personnel must maintain a physical distance of at least six feet from others who are not exercising and 12 feet from patrons performing any activity that increase their breathing rate or intensity.



- Consider having all staff development meetings remotely by using electronic means, such as email and teleconferencing, to the extent possible.
- Flu vaccines are critical in the fight against COVID-19 by (1) keeping workers and communities healthy and (2) reducing strain on our healthcare and testing systems that are responding to COVID-19. **Strongly encourage all personnel to get a flu shot.** Post signage to encourage flu vaccine among patrons, visitors, etc.
- Post signage around the facility reminding patrons to stay home if they have any symptoms, the requirements about physical distancing, face covering requirements, hand washing and/or sanitizing, etc.
- Indoor retail spaces within an indoor fitness center can open and must follow all protocols detailed in [Health Officer Directive 2020-17](#). Any indoor workspace such as offices or employee break rooms that are physically part of the facility and required to operate the facility may be used but must follow all protocols detailed in [Health Officer Directive 2020-18](#). All office functions that can be done remotely must continue to be done so to the maximum extent possible. The number of office workers counts towards the 10% capacity limit for the facility.
- Personal care services, such as massage therapy, must follow all protocols detailed in [Health Officer Directive No. 2020-30](#).

SETTING UP THE SPACE

Physical Distancing: Physical exertion from exercising can increase exhalation rate and intensity, making physical distancing even more important to lower the risks of transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19. **12 feet is the minimum distance** required around patrons performing any activity that increases breathing rate or intensity. **Six feet** is the **minimum distance** that is required **between those who are not performing exercise that increases breathing rate or intensity**. Whenever possible increase the distance.

- The maximum number of people, including Personnel and Patrons, allowed inside the facility at any time is the number that can maintain **at least** six feet of physical distance at all times AND 12 feet physical distance around exercising patrons – up to 10% of normal capacity. The 10% capacity limit applies to discrete spaces within the facility. For example, a gym's 10% capacity for an entire facility may be 50 people, but 10% capacity for a smaller room or space within the gym may only be two or three people.
- Patrons must maintain physical distancing of **at least** six feet from people outside their household at ALL TIMES AND 12 feet around patrons engaged in exercise that increases breathing rate or intensity. Use signage, floor tape and/or directional guidance to help to ensure physical distancing as personnel and patrons move around the space.
- Use signage and on-going monitoring to ensure that individual rooms and spaces within a facility do not exceed their capacity.
- Arrange the space and/or develop processes to monitor and maintain required physical distancing at all times. Consider one or more of the methods below:
 - Arrange equipment **at least** six feet apart (for example, for stretching) or 12 feet apart



(for example for stationary bike usage) where required by activity.

- Arrange equipment in an “X” pattern to provide greater distancing.
- Block off every other machine or move equipment so that they are farther apart.
- Develop a monitoring plan for which machines are in use at any time to maintain 12 feet of distance where needed. For example, stationary bicycles can be arranged around a space between other machines. Implement a reservation or sign up system for individual machines.
- Physical barriers can be helpful to minimize exposure between patrons and personnel or to segregate exercise areas but should not significantly block overall airflow in the space.
- Patrons may engage in self-directed fitness. For example, patrons may individually use free weights or other fitness equipment. Patron pathways to and from equipment must allow required physical distance be maintained at all times (for example, 12 feet of distance is required for a pathway that passes a cardio machine).
 - One-On-One Personal Training is allowed when at least six feet of physical distancing can be maintained, or 12 feet if any activity that increases breathing rate or intensity is performed.
 - Patrons are not permitted to engage in activities that require others to be within 6 feet for safety reasons or otherwise, such as spotting while lifting weights.

Activity and Space Considerations

- Indoor pools are not permitted.
- At the current time, pending further developments, climbing walls are banned due to the difficulty with adequately disinfecting between each use.
- Group cardio/aerobic fitness classes (such as spinning, kickboxing, etc.) are not permitted indoors at this time.
- High contact activities that require close contact of less than six feet in distance are not allowed unless otherwise permitted under the Stay-Safer-At-Home Order. This would include activities such as group sporting events, organized intermural activities, pick-up basketball, handball, or organized races.
- Ventilation is important to prevent transmission. Rooms or spaces which are known to have poor ventilation, such as squash courts, are prohibited. Indoor courts and fitness rooms can be utilized only for activities currently permitted in an indoor gym setting IF physical distancing requirements can be maintained at all times, face coverings are worn continuously, and the room is not known to have poor ventilation. Each separate room must maintain a maximum of 10% of its specific capacity. Having poor ventilation in a shared space that is used for exercise, even if the exercise is non-aerobic, can substantially increase the risk of transmission.
- For patrons using self-directed fitness equipment, disinfectant spray and wipes must be conveniently located and available for patrons to wipe off equipment between usage by patrons (see Sanitizing and Disinfecting section, below). Take steps to ensure that another patron does not begin using self-directed fitness equipment before it has been disinfected. Personnel should



monitor compliance with disinfecting self-directed fitness equipment and the availability of disinfecting supplies. Patrons and personnel should be provided information, by signage or other means, about how to inform the facility's designated COVID-19 monitor of safety concerns in real time.

- Close locker rooms, showers, saunas, steam rooms, and other spaces not used specifically for physical fitness. These shall remain closed until further guidance is posted. (Note: Locker rooms may be open only to allow access to restroom areas; lockers, benches, and other locker room amenities must be closed). Businesses are encouraged to monitor use of restrooms by either requiring a key to access or stationing a restroom/locker room attendant nearby.
- Close childcare spaces, indoor playgrounds, and/or sensory walls/stations/tables.
- Closed areas/amenities must be made inaccessible to patrons by locking doors or using tape or other barriers to block off the area. At the entrance to each closed area and on each closed amenity, signage must be posted telling patrons that the area/amenity is off-limits.
- Gyms and fitness studios are encouraged to set aside spaces or times for use by community members who are vulnerable to poor health outcomes from COVID-19.
- Wherever possible, install touchless, automatic water dispensers for use with personal, reusable water bottles or single-use, disposable paper cups. Display signage reminding personnel and patrons that the bottle or cups should not touch the water dispenser. If a touchless water dispenser is not feasible, remind workers and patrons to wash their hands or use proper hand sanitizer before and after touching the water release button on drinking fountains.

Face Coverings

Heavy breathing increases the risk of spreading and contracting the virus that causes COVID-19. **Face coverings protect the wearer AND those around them and are critically important in Gyms and Fitness Centers.**

Face masks and other cloth face coverings keep people from spreading the virus to others by trapping respiratory droplets before they can travel through the air. The most recent research shows that face coverings ALSO protect the wearer by reducing amount of virus that reaches the wearer and thus decreases the risk of severe illness in the wearer. **Face coverings are one of the most important measures to protect personnel and patrons from COVID-19.**

- All patrons MUST wear face coverings AT ALL TIMES while in the gym and/or fitness center except while hydrating with normal breathing. [See the Face Covering Health Order No. C19-12c.](#) Gyms must post signage reminding patrons that they must comply with the following rules (a sample is attached. Check back regularly at: <https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19> as improved signage is developed to reflect our growing understanding of important COVID-19 prevention steps we can take for ourselves and our community).
 - Heavy exertion. Patrons must avoid exerting themselves to the point where they may want to remove their face covering. They must be able to wear the face covering continuously while exercising and should be advised to check with their health care professional if they are unsure what activities they can safely participate in while



continuously wearing a face covering.

- Hydration. Patrons should slow their breathing to a regular intensity before temporarily removing their face covering to hydrate and should then immediately replace their face covering, and wash or sanitize their hands if they touch their face.
- Eating. Eating is not allowed in the gym or fitness center because it provides additional time that patrons may remove their face covering which leaves those around them at higher risk.
- Replacing soiled face coverings. Recommend patrons bring a replacement face covering in case their face covering becomes wet or soiled. Patrons are only allowed to remove and replace their face covering outdoors and they should wash or sanitize their hands afterward.
- Types of face coverings:
 - Face covering with vents are **not** permitted. The facility must indicate in their Health and Safety Plan how they will train personnel to monitor and respond to patrons wearing face coverings with vents.
 - Gyms must post signage with the following recommendations around the quality of face coverings:
 - Best protection:
 - Surgical mask or multi-layered cloth mask
 - If using multi-layered cloth mask it should be tightly woven or high thread count cotton or cotton blend
 - Good fit – securely fits over nose, mouth, and under the chin
 - Good protection:
 - Single-layer cloth mask
 - Double-layered neck gaiter
 - Lower thread count cotton, silk, linen, polyester
 - Not recommended:
 - Masks that are loosely woven/loosely knit, folded bandana, single-layer neck gator
 - Unbreathable material such as plastic or leather
 - Overly porous material such as nylon or fleece
 - Poor fit – does not securely fit over nose, mouth, and under the chin
 - Consider providing face coverings for free or available to purchase for patrons.

Health Screenings of Patrons:

- Facilities must screen all patrons entering the facility with the questions about COVID-19 symptoms and exposure to COVID-19. Facilities must ask the questions and relay the information found at: <https://www.sfc-dcp.org/screeningvisitors>
- Facilities must exclude those who answer yes to any of the questions on the above form.

Sanitizing and Disinfecting:

- Gyms and Fitness Centers must develop a plan and implement sanitation requirements that



exceed standard industry requirements. Protocols should include but are not limited to the following:

- All personnel and patrons must wash or sanitize their hands upon entering the facility. Patrons must wash or sanitize their hands between before and after use of shared equipment.
- Facilities must provide a washing station, hand sanitizer, or sanitizing wipes for patrons and personnel.
- Require personnel to regularly clean and disinfect high touch areas and surfaces, such as doorknobs, handles, rails, light switches, restrooms, sinks, toilets, benches, front desk areas, keyboards, computers, phones, fitness machines, gear, accessories, sanitation stations and other equipment throughout the day following CDC guidelines found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>
- Require patrons to disinfect any fitness machine, accessories, or other equipment before and after each use. Post signage to remind patrons of this requirement. Make disinfectant spray and wipes available for patrons at convenient locations. Ensure that lined, non-touch trash receptacles are available.
 - If a patron is unable to wipe/disinfect equipment after exercise, provide “Ready to Clean” tags for members to place on equipment after use to alert personnel that the equipment must be sanitized before the next patron may use the equipment.
 - Take steps to ensure that another patron does not begin using self-directed fitness equipment before it has been disinfected. Personnel should monitor compliance with disinfecting self-directed fitness equipment and the availability of disinfecting supplies. Patrons and personnel should be provided information, by signage or other means, about how to inform the facility’s designated COVID-19 monitor of safety concerns in real time.
- Disinfecting products must be approved for use against COVID-19. An approved list can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Ventilation:

Make any necessary improvements to the ventilation of the establishment, including:

- HVAC systems (if one is present)
 - Ensure HVAC systems are serviced and functioning properly.
 - Evaluate possibilities for upgrading air filters to the highest efficiency possible.
 - Increase the percentage of outdoor air through the HVAC system, readjusting or overriding recirculation (“economizer”) dampers.



- Disable demand-control ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy
 - Evaluate running the building ventilation system even when the building is unoccupied to maximize ventilation. At the minimum, reset timer-operated ventilation systems so that they start operating 1-2 hours before the building opens and 2-3 hours after the building is closed.
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- Increase natural ventilation by opening windows and doors when environmental conditions and building requirements allow.
 - Consider installing portable air cleaners (“HEPA filters”).
 - If the establishment uses pedestal fans or hard mounted fans, adjust the direction of fans to minimize air blowing from one individual’s space to another’s space.

For more information and additional resources, please see the following: San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH): <https://www.sfgdcp.org/COVID-ventilation>.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if someone at my Gym or Fitness Center tests positive for COVID-19?

People may be able to transmit the virus 48 hours before they develop symptoms of COVID-19. Some people **never** develop symptoms and can still transmit the virus. See SFPDH guidance on [What to do if Someone at the Workplace Has COVID-19](#) which can be found at : www.sfgdcp.org/covid19-positive-workplace. Maintaining a list of personnel and patrons from the organization will help with contact tracing to help ensure the health of your clients and our community.

Some of our patrons use gloves for weightlifting and other exercise activities. Are they allowed?

Patrons may wear their gloves while working out but should be reminded about disinfecting and hand washing. Gloves do not replace disinfecting, hand washing or other sanitizing protocols.

What about towels?

Encourage guests to bring their own towels. If your establishment decides to provide towel service, used towels will need to be stored in a lidded container. Launder items according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely. Towels, whether provided by the establishment or brought by the guests, do not replace the requirement to disinfect fitness machines, accessories, or other equipment used by the patrons.

Should we encourage the use of face shields?

There is currently no recommendation that the general public wear eye protection for most day to day activities. However, your eyes can theoretically be a route of infection for COVID-19. A face shield or goggles (but not regular glasses) could provide protection against these types of exposures. Therefore, individuals, particularly those at high risk of exposure or serious disease from COVID, may decide to wear eye protection in addition to face covering as an extra layer of protection against acquiring COVID-19 infection.



Resources

Stay informed. Information is changing rapidly. Useful resources can be found at:

- San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH)
 - <https://www.sfdcp.org/covid19>
- Printable resources such as signage
 - <https://sf.gov/outreach-toolkit-coronavirus-covid-19>
- California Blueprint for a Safer Economy issued by the State of California
 - <https://covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy/#reopening-data>
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Industry Guidance for Fitness Facilities
 - <https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-fitness.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
 - List of Guidance documents (searchable)
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/guidance-list.html>
- Promoting face covering-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic: A POLICYMAKER'S GUIDE
 - <https://preventepidemics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Promoting-Face-covering-Wearing-During-COVID-19.pdf>

Wear Face Covering at All Times

Except while hydrating with normal breathing intensity

PACE YOURSELF

- Do NOT exert yourself to the point of wanting to remove your face covering
- Only engage in activities in which it is safe for you to continuously wear a face covering. Check with your doctor if you are unsure.

SLOW DOWN BEFORE HYDRATING

- Before removing your face covering to hydrate, make sure your breathing has slowed to a regular intensity

NO EATING

- Step outside if you must eat.

STEP OUTSIDE IF CHANGING MASK

- Bring a replacement face covering in case yours gets wet or soiled.
- You MUST go outside to remove and replace your face covering.
- Wash or sanitize hands after replacing soiled face covering.

YOUR FACE COVERING PROTECTS ME AND YOU

The better your face covering, the better protected we
all are

Best protection:

- Surgical mask or multi-layered cloth face covering
 - If using multi-layered cloth face covering it should be tightly woven or high thread count cotton or cotton blend
- Good fit – securely fits over nose, mouth, and under the chin

Good protection:

- Single-layer cloth face covering
- Double-layered neck gaiter
- Lower thread count cotton, silk, linen, polyester

Not recommended:

- Face coverings that are loosely woven/loosely knit, folded bandana, single-layer neck gaiter
- Unbreathable material such as plastic or leather
- Overly porous material such as nylon or fleece
- Poor fit – does not securely fit over nose, mouth, and under the chin

NOT PERMITTED:

- Face coverings with vents