



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

May 7, 2020

Office of Governor Phil Murphy
The State House
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

MEMORANDUM RE: THE SAFE REOPENING OF HEALTH CLUBS

TO: Governor Phil Murphy

FROM: International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA)

The fitness industry plays a central and essential role in the promotion and maintenance of mental, physical, and social health and wellbeing. Health and fitness clubs, through the promotion of community health and immunity, are an integral part of the solution to returning your citizens to a state of good health.

As an industry, we want to get back, as soon as possible, to provide a safe and supportive place for the members of our communities to exercise. While many clubs have tried to fill the gap with virtual fitness offerings, the members of our clubs are telling us daily they can't wait to get back to our clubs. In addition, we believe that many people who have not been regular exercisers now recognize the importance of their physical activity and a healthy lifestyle, and need a place to learn what and how to do it safely. For all those reasons we believe clubs should reopen as soon as it is safe and possible. We are committed to opening our facilities while putting the safety of our staff, members, and community first.

In New Jersey, over 1,000 health clubs were shuttered on March 16, earlier than most other industries in the state. These local businesses provide safe, supportive environments to improve physical and mental health. New Jersey residents have gone over a month without access to this vital outlet.

Fitness is not only necessary for physical health and immunity. It has extensive mental health benefits as well, which is critical in a time when many citizens are experiencing sadness or loneliness. [Studies show](#) that exercise can help prevent depression, and can be [an effective](#)



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

[treatment](#) comparable to pharmacotherapy or psychotherapy. Exercise also has [numerous benefits](#) to people with substance use disorders, who are particularly suffering during a pandemic that addiction experts have called “a national relapse trigger.”

Our industry is currently identifying key considerations using the best-available science to help mitigate risk. We are looking at frameworks and will gather best practices to support them.

At present, we suggest a four-pronged approach to safety.

1. Keeping COVID-19 out of the club by implementing appropriate visitor and staff screenings.
2. Minimizing the risk of spread through containment measures.
3. Recognizing everyone’s role in minimizing risk through education and encouraging all members and staff to take all the actions possible to avoid spreading the virus.
4. Minimizing exposure risk by implementing enhanced, evidence-based cleaning and sanitation practices.

We have attached our expanded reopening plan below, based on these four principles. We ask that you consider the attached plan as you reopen the state.

New Jersey’s health clubs are eager to provide their communities with the benefits of health through exercise while protecting consumers’ health and wellbeing. Our clubs are happy to work with the Department of Public Health to help establish guidelines for safe reopening. If I can connect you with clubs to create guidelines for reopening or provide you with any additional information on this matter or about the fitness industry, please do not hesitate to contact Jeff Perkins, IHRSA’s assistant vice president of government relations, at jdp@ihrsa.org, or by calling IHRSA at 617-951-0055.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joe Moore'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joe Moore
President & CEO, IHRSA



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

Four-Pronged Framework to Reopening

This document by the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA) provides a framework for managing risks associated with COVID-19 within exercise facilities. It was created with reference to the World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), John Hopkins Center for Health Security, as well as in consultations with club operators and Federations partners worldwide.

As noted in the [John Hopkins Guidance for Governors](#), “Any place where people come together or have contact with shared surfaces could, in theory, be a transmission opportunity. Exact quantification of the risk of various activities is not possible...” Though elsewhere in the document, it says that “it is possible to reduce that risk with targeted mitigation steps.”

The following provides a four-pronged framework to:

- mitigate risk and allow health and fitness clubs to reopen,
- provide a safe and supportive place for physical activity, and
- pursue mental health and physical wellbeing.

1. Minimizing COVID-19 exposure by implementing appropriate screening measures

Screening

Most health authorities strongly encourage people exhibiting signs of illness or cold/flu-like symptoms—cough, runny nose, fever—to stay home and avoid being around other people. Clubs will implement a range of policies and procedures to ensure staff and members/customers are symptom-free, and at low risk for previous exposure to COVID-19.

2. Minimizing the risk of spread through mitigation measures

Facility and Equipment

Facility capacity limits. As clubs reopen, capacity will be limited to reduce the spread of the virus, per local and national health authority, and WHO advice. Capacity limitations will vary depending on the facility type and size, and areas within the facility that are open to members. All persons in the club (staff and members) should be able to maintain a distance of at least six feet/two meters between them as recommended by the WHO and/or in compliance with state and local health authorities.



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

Equipment access. Rearrangement of cardio and strength equipment and benches and racks in the free weight area will ensure adequate social distancing. Clubs will turn off, un-plug, or otherwise remove from operational use certain pieces of equipment to ensure appropriate social distance.

Additionally, visitors will be encouraged to practice social distancing, including avoidance of “working in” with others or otherwise sharing equipment. Members will be encouraged to time retrieval of closely arranged equipment such as dumbbells or medicine balls to avoid close contact with others.

Class schedule and capacity. Class schedules will be staggered to allow members/staff to properly disinfect equipment and class space. Class capacity and flow will be adjusted to ensure adequate social distancing between all participants and instructor, to be enforced by staff as appropriate.

Locker rooms, showers, saunas, steam rooms, and other thermal rooms. If social distancing and cleaning requirements can be satisfied in the area(s), they may reopen as allowed by state/local authorities.

Swimming pools. If social distancing and cleaning requirements can be satisfied, pools may reopen where allowed by state/local authorities. Pool based activities and classes will be staggered to enable social distancing.

Communal areas. Staff is to review the arrangement of communal areas and make adjustments to ensure the implementation of adequate safety measures. They will also take steps to avoid close gathering/congregating. Some communal areas, such as cafes, may be closed depending on state or local regulations.

Customer services. Clubs will take steps to limit close personal interactions with staff, including implementing contactless payments for services or retail, reservations, and check-in.

Other areas in the club, such as spa facilities, salons, catering, and child care. Opening other areas of the club will be evaluated on the ability to put procedures or safeguards in place to minimize the spread of disease and will follow state and local guidelines.

3. Recognizing everyone’s role in minimizing risk through education and encouraging all members and staff to take all actions possible to avoid spreading the virus.

Employee protective measures. Employee safety is a top priority. Effective measures can include:

- personal protective equipment—e.g. masks, face covers, and gloves,
- limiting opportunities to congregate during check-ins or breaks,
- staggering schedules,
- and providing training in cleaning and disinfecting solutions.



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

These steps ensure both effective cleaning and employee safety.

Members' responsibilities. Members will be encouraged to practice good gym hygiene, to include:

- wiping down equipment before and after use,
- washing hands before, during, and after workouts, as needed,
- practicing social distancing in all areas of the club,
- and using protective equipment as desired or required.

Instruction, coaching, and training can be allowed if members and staff observe social distancing and the highest level of cleaning standards.

Reminder mechanisms. Visual aids—e.g. posters, floor markings, etc.—will be on display, informing and reminding customers and staff of social distances and cleaning protocols throughout the facility.

4. Minimizing exposure risk by implementing enhanced, evidence-based cleaning, and sanitation practices.

The facility will post clear cleaning procedures for member reference throughout the club.

Club staff will be mobilized to clean frequently and thoroughly throughout the club.

All agents used for cleaning and/or disinfection will be approved by management and recommended by the WHO, or national/state/ provincial health department and registered as appropriate with the national/state/ provincial regulatory agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the U.S.

Clubs are to provide disinfectant stations in all key areas throughout the club, including the entrance/exit, reception/front desk, studios, the fitness floor, in cardio areas, swimming pools, spa, locker rooms, and catering.

If you have questions, please contact Jeff Perkins, IHRSA's assistant vice president of government relations at (617) 316-6722 or jdp@IHRSA.org.