

COVID-19 Reopening Guidelines for Nova Scotia Fitness Facilities

Introduction

These guidelines are to help reopen and maintain safe operating conditions for fitness facilities across Nova Scotia, including but not limited to private/publicly owned multi use facilities, studios, bootcamp facilities, spin studios, yoga studios, personal training studios.

This guidance document represents said fitness facilities in Nova Scotia however is not made up of an official association.

It will be up to individual business owners and managers to conduct a risk assessment of their facility and create their own Facility specific guidance document prior to reopening. This document must be posted within the gym for members and regulators to be able to access. The risk assessment is used to assess the potential for exposure to SARS-cov-2 in each facility and will inform on appropriate control measures for each individual situation.

Make decisions using these guidelines and to implement requirements for your businesses, your clients and your staff upon reopening. There are many different business situations in this industry. Please read these guidelines in their entirety in order to decide which situation best fits your personal and business circumstances. Not all the guidelines will apply to your individual situation. It will be up to individual business owners to decide at this time what to implement in individual facilities. Your safety, the safety of your clients/members and your staff comes first and foremost when deciding on any new protocols.

These guidelines are to be used as a reference for each facility to develop their own plan that accurately represents their individual business needs and offerings. These plans need to be kept on hand for inspection purposes.

Please refer to the link below for development of facility specific risk assessment plans

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/occupational-health-and-safety/>

Requirements

This guidance document includes requirements regarding:

1. Screening / Pre Screening
2. Signage
3. Access Controls Entry Exit
4. Ventilation
5. Number of Clients / Social Distancing
6. Hand Hygiene / Cleaning / disinfection
7. Re-Opening Procedure following a required closure
8. Use of PPE
9. Pools
10. Group Training
11. Personal Training
12. Locker Rooms/Showers/Washrooms/Water Fountains
13. Employees/Contractors

This guidance document must be completely reviewed and applied before you open your facility to members, clients, or the public. Facility / Studio owners /operators are responsible to ensure that staff have read, and are able to ask questions regarding this directive. Staff must be trained and audited on the implementation of all policies and procedures. **It should be noted compliance officers may show up unannounced to conduct an inspection.**

Implementation of Phases is County Specific based on current public health restrictions

1. Client Screening / Pre Screening

Facility operators/staff must assess and screen clients/members for symptoms of COVID-19 as per the requirements of Public Health. Clients/members exhibiting signs and symptoms consistent with COVID-19, updated symptom list ; <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/symptoms-and-testing/> should not present for services during the pandemic. Clients/members must be advised when booking an appointment that they cannot attend if, on the day of the appointment, they have symptoms that could be COVID-19. The client/member should be advised to use the 811, on-line, self-assessment if they are unwell on the day of their appointment and only attend the appointment if they are told they do not need to be tested for COVID-19.

Each facility needs to enable a prescreening component for appointment based patronage as well as walk-ins that occur. Consider patron entry COVID-19 symptoms screening questionnaire to be given to every patron upon entrance to the facility.

Pre-screening is required when taking bookings or appointments.

Screening questions that must be asked at the time of booking must follow public health guidance for symptoms and testing found at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/symptoms-and-testing/>.

Screening questions are to include as follows:

- Are you sick or symptomatic?
- Have you travelled outside Atlantic Canada within the last 14 days?
- Are you a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19?
- Are you waiting for results of a COVID-19 test?

The pre-screening protocol will vary among the various types of facilities, the importance that all facilities ensure that any member entering the facility would have answered the pre screening questions is paramount. Multiple avenues of pre-screening is strongly recommended.

Some of the different avenues this can be accomplished include but are not limited to:

- In person direct questioning
- Form completion before appointment via online form (facilities need to consider the time between completing this form and their appointment. If this method of pre-screening is used other supplementary methods are strongly recommended).
- Visual representation of questioning through signage
- Phone questionnaire before arrival
- Representation of prescreening questionnaire via email/social media

Advise clients when they make an appointment that they cannot attend if they are feeling unwell the day of the appointment. The client should also be advised to use the

811 on-line self-assessment if they are unwell, find out if you need a COVID-19 test <https://when-to-call-about-covid19.novascotia.ca/en> .

Place signs near entrances informing customers not to enter the facility if they are exhibiting symptoms. Ensure signage is placed at a location where it is visible, draws attention, and is readable.

2. Signage

All facilities, regardless of size and capacity will be required to post adequate signage in the facility detailing hygienic procedures, handwashing policies, social distancing policies and other important policies related to limiting the spread of COVID-19. Provincially required signs must be posted at all times. Additional infographics and signage specific to the services offered by the facility are highly recommended.

Communicate the facility's protocols to delivery people and couriers through signage posted at the workplace. These people are expected to follow the same procedures for social distancing and hygiene that others at the workplace must follow.

Ensuring signage is posted for social distancing and instructions on cleaning equipment. Clearly indicate how and who is responsible for cleaning equipment before and after using it. Ensure instructions and mechanisms in place for patrons to clean equipment safely. Facility staff should monitor and ensure thorough cleaning between use.

The Nova Scotia government has signage which may be used here:

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/resources/>

3. Access Control Entry Exit

Controlling access to each fitness facility is of paramount importance. Once a patron has accessed a facility, maintaining appropriate social distancing of at least 2 m (6 feet) is the responsibility of each facility and their staff members.

Access to each fitness facility must be controlled via a specified entry and exit. Only one entry is recommended for the purpose of managing crowds and gathering limits. No more than two entries and exits to a building are currently being recommended at this time due to the inability to adequately staff and control entry to a facility. If the entry and exit can be different locations, this is preferred to limit contact between patrons. Access to a facility must be for the purpose of utilizing the fitness facility services and not for any social reason. Patrons of the facility must sign into the facility prior to using the facility services.

Check-in to a facility must be contactless at this time. Consider the use of online platforms for check-in, limiting the number of staff at the front desk or entryway and using online payment methods if this is within the capacity of the facility (if this is not, minimum social distance of 6 ft must be maintained between staff and patrons upon check-in).

Utilize membership access tools (i.e. use of swipe card, showing of membership card, verification of member) to provide a means to create a central collection for access controls.

Manage and direct where and how people can travel through your facility. This may include designating doorways for entrance and exit, also using one-way staircases or walkways where possible, clearly indicating the direction of traffic flow with floor markings. Post signage indicating how these rules can be followed.

In the situations where access to the public has been limited, such as direction to close for all public use this does still permit the administrative aspect of the facilities to continue to function using the best practices for workplaces. Virtual and online services may still be offered while respecting other aspects of the Health Protection Act Order, especially in relation to the gathering limits.

There is a necessity for each facility to enable contact tracing protocols to ensure your facility has a registry of visitors via client registry (name, phone, date and time of visit) and a staff registry (date and time of work shifts) to enable accurate contact tracing by Public Health in the event of an exposure.

Additional strategies to manage the number of people at the facility, should consider using a booking system with set duration workout periods. Request that customers do not arrive more than 5 minutes before their appointment and coordinate appointment times to effectively manage the number of active users at one time and reduce wait times. If possible, access to the facility should be appointment based only.

Remove unnecessary communal items such as magazines, and complimentary phone chargers and remove or block off the use of furniture.

4. Ventilation

All facilities are required to assess their mechanical ventilation systems to ensure they are operating appropriately. Considerations should be made to increase the percentage of outside air to increase dilution of contaminants, and minimize recirculation, whenever possible, while maintaining indoor air conditions. If make-up air and recirculating systems exist then a plan for how filtration is managed factoring in, at minimum, the use of an electrostatically charged MERV (minimum efficiency reporting value) of 13 filter or HEPA filtration depending on the systems capability given the added pressure drop is required. Facilities with mechanical ventilation systems should ensure adequate airflow is maintained when it is occupied. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and

Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) recommends a minimum of 20 cubic feet per minute (cfm) of supply air per person or 0.18 cfm per square foot of floor space. See ASHRAE COVID-19 Preparedness Resources updates for more information (<https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/resources>). Businesses are encouraged to consult with a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) professional for complex heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems when assessing and evaluating their mechanical equipment.

Maintain the relative humidity at 40-60%.

In facilities where no mechanical ventilation is present, businesses must increase natural ventilation as much as possible by opening windows and doors if safe to do so. Portable high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration units or other types of air purifying equipment suitable for biohazards like SARS-cov-2 may be considered to remove contaminants in the air of poorly ventilated areas.

We recommend no use of fans, but if used any type of fixed or mobile fan should not be used in situations unless positioned in a manner that does not aerosolized potentially viral particles in peoples breathing zones and does not produce horizontal or countercurrent airflow

Consideration of room pressurization and what impact this will have to control potential transmission should be addressed.

Consideration must be given not to conduct fitness activities, such as aerobic activities where high exertion is common (e.g. cardio machines, group aerobic classes, etc.) in rooms/spaces/areas that are poorly ventilated. Activities of this nature must be moved to areas of the facility where good indoor air quality can be maintained.

5. Number of Clients / Social Distancing / Distancing of Equipment

Ensure that workers and customers maintain social distancing protocols. Mark spaces on the floor where people can stand at the front desk with intervals of 2 metres for customers to line up. Barriers, such as plexiglass or polymer barriers, may be used to reduce the risk of transmission but they cannot be used to substitute for social distancing.

Establish and control occupancy limits that ensure the social distancing requirement can be maintained. See [Order under the Health Protection Act for the most recent](#) guidance on restrictions that may impact the number of users. Consider floor surface area, possible reconfiguration of accessible areas, and availability and type of equipment used when determining capacity limit.

Reconfigure waiting areas to maintain the social distancing requirement (e.g., remove or reduce the number of tables and chairs).

Ensure that social distancing and disinfection protocols are adhered to for any over the counter sales for admission, products sold, vending machines and pro shop items. Alter the display of items to eliminate the handling by customers.

Consider distancing equipment at least 6 feet apart with greater distancing for treadmills and other aerobic fitness equipment where high exertion is common. Another suggestion is aerobic fitness equipment can be arranged in a “X” pattern with users facing away from one another to provide greater social distancing. Physical barriers can also be helpful to create distancing or segregate exercise areas.

Orientation of equipment should be so that users are not face to face.

6. Hand Hygiene / Cleaning / disinfection

Hand hygiene is recognized as an important infection prevention and control (IPC) practice to break the chain of transmission of infectious diseases, including respiratory illness such as COVID-19.

Hand hygiene can be accomplished by either washing hands with soap and water then drying with single use cloth or paper towels, or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer must be approved by Health Canada (DIN or NPN number), with a final concentration of 60-80 percent ethanol or 60-75 percent isopropanol.

When hands are visibly soiled, they must be cleaned with soap and water as opposed to using alcohol-based hand rub.

Provide adequate handwashing or hand sanitizer stations for customers and staff to use upon entering the facility and when leaving.

A significant component of hand hygiene is not touching your face. In addition to proper hand hygiene, owners and staff must also avoid touching their face and practice respiratory etiquette by coughing or sneezing into their elbow or covering coughs and sneezes with facial tissue and then disposing of the tissue immediately. When contact with the face or a tissue is made, hand hygiene must occur before resuming any activities in the clinic environment.

If linen service is still offered, establish policies to ensure all laundry is handled appropriately. Provide clearly marked laundry bins and ensure dirty linens are laundered before next use. Enhanced laundering practices are not required above the usual practices in place. There should be NO shared towels in the facility.

Single use cloth towels that are used in the clinic for hand hygiene must be laundered in hot water (above 60°C) with regular laundry soap and fully dried before being used

again. Staff handling these towels should be gloved for both dirty and clean laundry processing. Staff must always use new gloves when handling clean laundry.

Encourage frequent hand washing and good hygiene as per recommendations found here <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/HandWashing-Poster.pdf>

Effective cleaning and disinfection are essential to avoid the possible spread of SARS-cov-2 virus, which is spread through contact with respiratory droplets or contact with contaminated surfaces. The virus causing COVID-19 can survive for differing periods of time depending on the surfaces it lands on. Frequent cleaning and disinfection are necessary to prevent spread of the disease.

Cleaning products remove soiling such as dirt, dust and oils, but do not always sanitize surfaces. Disinfectants are applied after cleaning to sanitize resulting in the destruction of germs. Read, understand and apply the cleaning standards from the Health Canada guide on cleaning and disinfecting public spaces during COVID-19.

Proper disinfectant products:

Disinfectants with an 8-digit Drug Identification Number (DIN) are approved for use by Health Canada. During the pandemic, only the Health Canada-approved disinfectants with a virucidal claim are appropriate for the elimination of viruses in the clinic environment. The disinfectant product manufacturer's instructions must be followed for use, safety, contact time, storage and shelf life.

Authorized list of hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>

Vinegar, tea tree oil solutions, Thieves' oil and similar solutions are not proven to be effective disinfectants and cannot be used in place of Health Canada-approved disinfectants. It is a requirement that only approved disinfectants with a virucidal claim are used to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Be sure you and your staff take appropriate precautions when using chemicals for cleaning and disinfecting. This can be done by consulting the Manufacturer's Safety Data Sheets when using cleaners and disinfectants. Staff must be supplied with the appropriate safety equipment (e.g. gloves, eye protection, and masks) to protect themselves when they clean and disinfect.

Workplaces should implement enhanced environmental cleaning.

Commonly touched surfaces and shared equipment should be cleaned and disinfected after contact between individuals, even when not visibly soiled. This includes fitness equipment and machines, door handles, doorknobs, light switches, railings, elevator buttons, toilets, desks and tabletops etc.

Disinfectants for clients should be conveniently located. Patrons should be required to wipe down the equipment before and after use, with employees reinforcing and ensuring this practice is maintained. Consider discontinuing the use of reusable towels and cloths.

Workplaces should provide employees with resources such as tissues, no-touch trash receptacles, hand soap, Health Canada approved hand sanitizers, disinfectants and disposable towels to promote a safe and hygienic work environment.

Provide adequate bins for the safe disposal of paper towels that have been used for cleaning and personal use. The bins should be lined with plastic bags, which are tied and disposed of regularly according to local refuse storage and collection requirements

Provide a lined waste bin for customers to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and other safety equipment, such as masks and gloves, when entering and exiting the facility.

7. Re-opening Procedure following a required closure

If at anytime an Order is issued for closure under the Health Protection Act the following would be the phased approach to be adopted as a re-opening strategy for the return to public and membership activities:

Phase One - following an industry closure in a County specific health zone

Facility capacity will be reduced to 50% of limits using fire code or building code max occupancy limits as a guide.

Non medical face masks are mandatory within all public and non-public areas when not performing exercise (i.e. walking between cardio machines, entering/exiting weightlifting areas, etc).

Each facility will increase the minimum social distancing limit to 3 metres for high intensity activities, for example a 3 meter x 3 meter box. It is the duty of each facility owner and employees to ensure that during high intensity activity, the orientation of the participants should ensure that they are not expelling respiratory droplets directly towards other participants in the facility. This would include but not limited to

- High Intensity Group Classes
- Positioning of equipment that could incur high intensity activity (ie: treadmills/spin bikes not to be facing each other)

- Orientation of trainers/coaches/instructors working with members not to be face to face during said high intensity activity
- Clearly marked spaces during high intensity activities that allow for the minimum of 3 metres to be adhered to with respect to airflow as well as the orientation of the individual in relation to other participants present during these activities

The use of fans for increased airflow is not recommended at this time

In areas/spaces of poor ventilation consider increasing social distancing beyond 3 meters, or having the area temporarily sectioned off until ventilation can be improved

Prior to re-opening, or anytime a Phase Two to Phase One regression takes place consider re-evaluating ventilation systems to ensure they are functioning properly

Adjust signage and communicate to clients/members (signage, social media, emails, pre screen, etc) that Phase One protocols are in place and need to be adhered to

Consider increasing frequency of cleaning measures, spacing clients/member bookings to allow for more focused cleaning disinfection protocols

For low intensity activities (such as yoga, pilates, skill based instruction between clients and trainers/coaches a minimum of 2 metres to allow for social distancing must be adhered to and that all equipment spacing support, traffic areas support this allowance.

Phase Two

Facility capacity will be reduced to 75% of limits using fire code or building code max occupancy limits as a guide.

Return to pre-closure condition of 2 meters for all activities, and 1 meter with masks in groups of pre-existing social/family bubbles (number of people to be determined by current Public Health requirements) lead by certified personal trainer's for the purpose of instructional exercise, once exercise is beyond instructional intensity or masks are removed by participants distancing is at a minimum of 2 meters.

The length of time for the phasing will be determined in discussions with Public Health.

8. Use of PPE

Non-medical masks are mandatory for employees, customers and the general public as per public health directives for businesses that are readily open to and accessible by the public (e.g. day use, drop in, etc.). If you're at an indoor public place and you're doing a physical activity where a mask cannot be worn, you can remove your mask for the duration of the activity, but you must wear it at all other times in the facility. If the facility or business is exclusive to members (i.e. only allows people with memberships to enter), then this is considered a private space where masks are not mandatory under the public health order. However, while it's not required by the Public Health order, it is highly recommended that private facilities follow the same masking requirements as indoor public spaces. Where members are not required to have masks or can remove their face coverings temporarily, businesses must ensure sufficient infection control practices (e.g., ventilation, air exchange, frequent cleaning and disinfection, etc) outlined in this guidance are continuously implemented and maintained. The implemented control measures must be sufficient to protect the staff and members from exposure to the hazard.

9. Pools

The number of members allowed in large whirlpools and swimming pools must be limited and monitored by workers based on the size of the swimming pool or whirlpool to ensure social distancing.

10. Group Classes

Utilize Pre-screening protocol for appointments.

Ensure class times are staggered to allow for thorough cleaning by staff between usage. While allowing adequate time to disinfect equipment and surfaces before each class.

Prohibit the use of shared equipment unless able to disinfect between users

Group classes should only be offered if social distancing measures can be maintained.

Consider holding outdoor classes to ensure the 2 metre social distancing requirement is maintained.

Encourage patrons to bring their own personal equipment, such as yoga mats, etc.

High-intensity classes may result in greater dispersion of droplets from each participant due to higher intensity breathing in addition to participant movement. Group classes

must not be offered unless at least 6 feet of social distance in between members, and in-between instructors and members, is maintained before, during and

after the class, and unless there is no person-to-person physical contact.

High-powered fans may result in greater dispersion of droplets. Fans that are positioned to blow across people are not allowed. Another consideration is to further reduce class sizes to maintain room temperature at manageable levels without the use of high-powered fans.

Mark a designated exercise area for each client to stay inside of during a workout.

Remove unused equipment from group fitness rooms to create additional space for clients.

11. Personal Training

Consider the use of technology for virtual training where possible.

Utilize Pre-screening protocol for in person appointments.

Advise both clients and trainers to arrive close to their appointment time. Ensure that the waiting area is configured so that people can maintain social distancing.

Ensure trainers and customers refrain from physical contact and adhere to the 2 metre social distancing requirement from each other and other customers during the session.

The trainer must adhere to social distancing of 2 metres at all times. A distance of 1 meter with masks in groups of pre-existing social/family bubbles (number of people to be determined by current Public Health requirements) lead by certified personal trainer's for the purpose of instructional exercise, once exercise is beyond instructional intensity or masks are removed by participants distancing is at a minimum of 2 meters.

Where possible discourage training activities that necessitate close contact with other people (e.g., sparring in martial arts studios, and games in contact sports).

As much as possible, coaching sessions should be conducted in a manner that avoids touching clients. Consider using verbal cues while coaching or using technology to share instructional material and practice plans.

For activities involving direct contact, ensure that hand hygiene is performed before and after contact. Hand hygiene can be accomplished by either washing hands with soap and water then drying with single use cloth or paper towels, or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer must be approved by Health Canada (DIN or NPN number), with a final concentration of 60-80 percent ethanol or 60-75 percent isopropanol.

Limit the number of personal trainers on site at any one time to ensure facility capacity is not exceeded. Ensure that this coincides with scheduling and overall occupancy in the facility.

12. Locker Rooms>Showers>Washrooms>Water Fountains

Establish and post occupancy limits of each area to ensure the social distancing requirement can be maintained. Consider various means to control use such as assigning lockers, single use shower or washroom areas and or limit the number of units available for use.

Remove unnecessary items to facilitate the cleaning of these areas.

Remove complimentary shared personal items such as hairspray, hairdryers, and deodorant sprays.

Determine how people should move through these locations to maintain the social distancing requirement. Tape and/or floor markings can be used on the floor to designate walking and changing areas, and where possible identify one-way walkways to help ensure social distancing.

Block off the required amount of lockers to ensure social distancing of 2 meters so that people don't need to stand close together to access their items, and ensure that members are educated on the necessity to disinfect before and after usage, to be reinforced by regular cleaning by staff.

Recommended discontinue use of showers where possible and or limit their use to meet social distancing- one at a time and increased cleaning schedule. Shower curtains cannot be used as a barrier to replace social distancing.

Encourage patrons come in fully prepared for their activity, including wearing workout attire to discourage excessive usage of locker room areas.

Always keep toilets thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and monitor frequently throughout the day. Keep available disposable paper towels, liquid soap/hand sanitizer and always have hot water available in all washrooms. There should be NO shared

towels for drying or washing hands in client or staff washrooms. Paper towel is best and should be discarded in a covered waste container.

At no time while under Phase One or Phase Two restrictions will the use of public water fountains be permitted

13. Employees / Contractors

Staff training should be held online if possible or in small groups with social distancing measures in place. Ensure employees are prepared, educated and up-to-date on all new policies, rules and sanitation/disinfection processes required.

Facility must require that staff are familiar with the current symptoms of COVID-19 and self-monitor for these symptoms. If a staff show any COVID-19 symptoms they must be immediately sent home from the fitness facility and perform the online self-assessment (<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/symptoms-and-testing/>).

Complete COVID-19 employee screening questionnaire at the start of every shift for possible symptoms. Advise staff that they cannot attend if they are feeling unwell the day of their shift. The staff member should also be advised to use the 811 on-line self-assessment if they are unwell.

Employees are required to practice social distancing at work. Avoid handshakes and any other physical contact with others. Remain two metres apart from others at all times.

Employees should wash their hands upon arrival at work and frequently throughout the day. Avoid touching your face, mouth, nose and eyes.

Use an Health Canada approved hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty and handwashing with soap and water isn't available.

Only use hand sanitizer that is approved by Health Canada (DIN or NPN number).

Non-medical face masks must be worn at all times in common areas of facilities and wherever interacting with clients or the public. Please see link for appropriate donning and doffing of masks procedures. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/how-put-remove-clean-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>

Sources:

Nova Scotia's Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Disease Health System Protocol
<https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/coronavirus-documents.asp>

Screening Checklist
<https://when-to-call-about-covid19.novascotia.ca/en>

ASHRAE COVID-19 Preparedness Resources
<https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/resources>

WorkSafe British Columbia ,2020 , <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/covid-19-returning-safe-operation/gyms-and-fitness-centres>

Saskatchewan Government, 2020,
<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/re-open-saskatchewan-plan/guidelines/gyms-and-fitness-facilities-guidelines>

Manitoba Government, 2020,
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/phase-two.html>

Coronavirus (COVID-19): working and businesses
<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/working-during-covid-19/>