



November 15, 2020

**To: Governor Jay Inslee
Drew Shirk
Nick Streuli
Jon Snyder
Lauren McCloy
Dr. Jon Weisman, Washington State Department of Health
Washington State Legislature**

From: Washington Fitness Alliance

Subject: Request for Immediate Reconsideration – November 15th Closure of Gyms and Fitness Facilities

The Washington Fitness Alliance (WFA) is surprised and dismayed by today's decision to order the closure of indoor gyms and fitness facilities until December 14. The month-long closure will lead to the permanent closure of many small businesses across the state who are barely making ends meet under the current restrictions. We are deeply troubled by the rejection of ideas submitted by WFA to improve upon current guidelines.

It makes no sense to penalize a sector that, according to data and studies, has not been a source of COVID-19 infections and has proven it can safely provide a valuable service to the public during the pandemic.

The private and non-profit facilities closed by today's announcement provide a safe venue for people across the state, across all demographics and income levels, and in every walk of life to improve their physical and emotional well-being. They provide physical therapy services tailored for individuals and deliver injury rehabilitation and recovery programs that all of us need at some point in our lives.

Research has demonstrated that our physical wellbeing directly correlates to our emotional well-being, particularly during times of stress. This is especially important as we navigate the stresses with COVID-19 quarantines, school closures, the aftermath of wildfires and uncertain economic times.

Accordingly, we request immediate reconsideration of the decision to close all private and non-profit gyms and fitness facilities. The following summarizes information to support reconsideration.

1. According to the **Washington State Department of Health and Washington State Department of Labor and Industries November 10, 2020 report titled, “The COVID-19 Confirmed Cases by Industry Sector”**, there are no reported cases linked to gyms and fitness centers. We understand there may be limitations with the data in this study, but even if one assumes gyms and fitness centers are combined into arts, entertainment and recreation, the results show that the combined sector may have less than 1% of confirmed cases, with no information on where those cases have come from.

| Industry Sector | Count | Percent | Percent WA employed population |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------|--------------------------------|
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 316 | 1% | 2% |

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/IndustrySectorReport.pdf>

2. The latest **Washington State Outbreak** report from the Department of Health does not identify gyms or fitness facilities as a source of any outbreaks.
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/StatewideCOVID-19OutbreakReport.pdf>
3. The International Health Racquet and Sports Club Association (IHRSA) along with MXM, compiled data showed that **in more than 49 million visits in 2,800 locations across the country, there was a COVID occurrence rate of only .002%**. National data showed a ratio of 1 case of COVID reported out of 20,771 check-ins. A rate of only .005%. Additionally, CDC information **shows no data that fitness facilities are a source of outbreaks** and clubs are not “assembly areas” where people come to meet and greet in a close and unprotected manner.
4. The few cases cited were contracted elsewhere, not in gyms and fitness facilities. These results, however, should not be a surprise. **Examination of protocols across some key sectors reveals:**

| SAFETY STANDARDS | PRIMARY HEALTH CARE (Physical & Mental) | | | | | PERSONAL CARE | | LEISURE | |
|---|--|----------------|-----|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|
| | Doctor's Offices | Dentist Office | Lab | Physical Therapy | Fitness Centers | Hair Salons & Barbers | Personal Care Salons | Retail | Dine-In Restaurants |
| A Mask can be worn at ALL times | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Capacity can be managed | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Room for 100% Physical Distancing | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Extended Interaction between Individuals can be Avoided | | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Formal Check In process to Allow for Contact Tracing | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |

5. **Recent studies from the UK confirm that gyms and fitness center are safe and provide important benefits during the pandemic.** The study analyzed more than 62 million gym visits from 14 European countries since September and found that only 487 infections had been reported by operators, which works out to a rate of 0.78 cases per 100,000 visits. Dr. Rob Copeland, lead investigator commented,



"We know that being physically fit can help reduce the severity of Covid-19 infection and, moreover, being active can help us cope psychologically when faced with the challenges of a second wave of the pandemic across Europe. Keeping leisure centres and fitness clubs open and fully operational is critical to ensuring the health and wellbeing of our communities. I would go further and suggest that governments across Europe should be thinking about how we can increase access to activity, not reduce it, as we learn to live with Covid-19." <https://www.menshealth.com/uk/health/a34517222/how-likely-you-are-to-catch-coronavirus-at-the-gym/>

6. **Exercise increases immune strength** especially for those with comorbidities and reduces the length of infection (US Library of Medicine – NIH, July 2020 and University of Virginia Health System, April 2020)
7. **Gyms and Fitness Facilities are uniquely equipped to implement practices to protect against spread of COVID-19:**
 - a. HVAC systems in fitness facilities are equipped to minimize risks. Many clubs have taken further steps by investing in air scrubbers, UV light in ducts, MERV 13 filtering, 100% outside air cycling into the system etc.
 - b. Fitness Facilities can enforce COVID-protocols better than most industries. We know the most critical elements to keep indoor areas safe is the ability to wear a mask, stay distanced, enforce high cleaning standards, and contact trace. Fitness facilities and health facilities have demonstrated they can abide and enforce such standards.
 - c. Facilities have members who must check in. These systems allow for “real time” adherence to occupancy standards. It also allows for immediate access to data on usage by time, member, and location – easing challenges associated with contact tracing if necessary.
8. **People need a safe venue to improve their health and emotional well-being.** Private and non-profit facilities make exercise a practical option for many people unable to exercise in inclement weather conditions - *this is especially important during the Fall-Winter months and for most citizens that are not regularly trained athletes*
9. **Curtailment in private and non-profit gyms and fitness centers harm less affluent and disadvantaged communities.** Private and non-profit gyms and fitness centers provide a cost-effective venue for people to get a safe and healthy workout. For people with large homes and resources, home gyms may be practical. But for apartment and condominium dwellers, and people on tight budgets, home gyms are simply not practical. Gyms and fitness facilities are available at reasonable costs and times to meet every person’s individual needs. https://patch.com/california/temecula/fitness-industry-shutdown-punishes-rivcos-less-affluent?utm_source=share-link&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=share

Lastly, IHRSA has estimated that 6000 (nearly 20%) of health clubs in the US have already closed permanently. The permanent closures in Washington State are likely to be higher given the duration of our shutdown, especially in Central Washington. Not only is this unnecessary, but these businesses



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provide a valuable resource for structured and safe physical activity that greatly impacts the mental health and overall wellness of thousands of Washingtonians.

We strongly urge you to reconsider your position on the fitness sector, look at the data on how safely fitness has operated, consider the mental health of the tens of thousands of members who have been back in our clubs safely exercising in a structured way, and then consider where they will go and how they will stay safe if we are closed. We believe you are putting far more people at risk by closing fitness and recreation than by not only leaving these facilities open but allowing them to operate at a higher capacity.

Thank you for your consideration.

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