



# **FRAMEWORK FOR SAFE OPERATION IRELAND ACTIVE COVID 19: Safe operation of Leisure Centres, Health and Fitness Facilities**

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## INTRODUCTION

The leisure, health and fitness sector provide physical activity for over 1 million people each week in gyms, swimming pools and leisure centres across Ireland.

The sector employs more than 12,000 people across Ireland and will have an enormous role to play as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are here to support you in that goal.

The COVID-19 risk cannot be eliminated but it can be mitigated and minimised with the correct measures and communications.

The purpose of this document is to set out a framework for a standardised approach for how to resume your facilities, in line with government advice, so that you can:

- manage the health and safety risks of re-opening your facilities;
- minimise the risks to your employees and members/users;
- reduce the chances of COVID-19 recurring in the community

This framework supersedes previous Ireland Active Framework documents.

This is a living document which means as Government restrictions and Public Health guidelines evolve, this document will also evolve to reflect new Government advice and changes to protocols when they emerge. All sectoral guidelines have been developed in line with the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business and the Work Safely Protocol, based on the latest health guidance available from the Department of Health and the HSE. The links to latest guidelines will be included throughout the document.

**Disclaimer:** The information contained within these operational re-opening guidelines can change from time to time. It must not by itself be relied upon in determining obligations or other decisions. Users of this document must independently verify any information on which they wish to rely. If your facility or the provider cannot meet the minimum standards for safe operation they need to consider if it is safe to open. It is expected that all business owners and management will have familiarised themselves with the Work Safely Protocol prior to re-opening

and implemented all relevant requirements. Ireland Active and sporting agencies or agents, do not assume legal or other liability for any inaccuracy, mistake, misstatement, or any other error of whatsoever nature contained herein.

### **Recovery and Resilience: The Path Ahead**

In February 2021, a revised Resilience and Recovery 2021 Plan: The Path Ahead was published. This revised Plan outlines how COVID-19 will be managed over the next 6-9 months. The Government has announced a phased lifting of restrictions from 10 May 2021. [Click here](#) for further information.

To view the latest information on COVID-19 in Ireland [click here](#).

### **Protective Measures**

Leisure health and fitness businesses must ensure that ongoing protective measures are in place. The following protective measures are outlined in further detail throughout these Re-Opening Guidelines.

- Facility Capacity
- Physical Distancing Protocols
- One-Way Traffic Systems
- Contact Tracing
- Face Coverings
- Cleaning & Disinfection Protocols
- Noise Control Measures
- Pre return to work Health Screening for staff
- Health screen for facility users
- Ventilation

### **Facility Capacity**

- The capacity of your business must be reviewed prior to re-opening and at all times when your business is operational. Safe access/egress should be considered in all locations.
- Capacity should be based off the area of shared usage rather than overall facility size. (i.e. plant room/storage room should not be included in calculation.)
- Only if areas are fully independent should they be considered as being separate. If gym, pool, hall and pitches are all using shared reception/shared changing rooms, considerations should be made regarding capacity.

- The flow of individuals should be taken into consideration when deciding on facility capacity.
- Each area should be managed correctly and safely ensuring that multiple groups don't come together in common areas, changing rooms, access/egress routes etc. It is important that larger facilities don't create unnecessary risk in the reopening phase and weigh up all factors upon reopening.
- Management should have a written risk assessment in place which details how they can manage multiple groups in a large indoor facility without creating unacceptable risk.
- Maximum numbers per area in line with government advice must be displayed and monitored to ensure it is not exceeded.
- Consider closure of changing and shower rooms if the capacity guidelines cannot be managed appropriately.
- Gym/studio and swimming pool layouts need to be reviewed to ensure the recommended physical distancing and other protective measures can be strictly adhered to.

## **WHAT YOU SHOULD CONSIDER**

COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge for the leisure, health and fitness sector. Before re-opening, businesses will need to review how they work and employ new practices and procedures to ensure everyone stays safe.

The considerations may vary based on the unique attributes of each facility. The measures you implement can go above the standards set out in this document, but we advise that they should not go below these minimum standards.

You should continually monitor the websites of the governmental and other authorities listed below as well as Ireland Active's website for any updated guidance including updates of this document.

### **Risk Assessment**

A site-specific risk assessment should be carried out for operation during COVID-19 to identify areas where there is risk of infection spread. Use the information services of the Health and Safety Authority to assist you with this.

All the other usual health and safety provisions should remain in place alongside and integrated into this assessment. If the risk assessment results in an unacceptable level of risk for a certain activity it should not take place. Facilities should present this risk assessment document to the Employers and Public Liability Insurer for the business and secure their input and approval.

### **Restructuring Operations**

Leisure, sport and fitness businesses of all types need to adapt their operations, review employee practices and consider the design of their business to provide a safe environment for users and employees and ensure physical distancing and the prevention of the spread of COVID-19.

We acknowledge the measures will be onerous for many facilities and may require facilities to reduce their operations significantly. Facilities should undertake a [business continuity plan](#) and avail of [government supports](#) where available. Ireland Active continues to engage with government to seek business support to allow commercial operations to become viable on re-opening.

### **Duty of Care**

Facilities should consider taking specific advice on their specific duty of care and legal liability. The general provisions of the Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 still pertain to leisure centres, gyms and swimming pools and all businesses should update their risk assessments and safety statements to take account of COVID-19.

Employers and employees both have a general duty of care to ensure “as far as reasonably practicable” the safety, health and welfare at work of employees/colleagues. A duty of care also extends to provide a reasonably safe environment for users / customers and members of the facility.

Exposure to COVID-19 may present a health risk to employees and users so, in addition to conducting a risk assessment, facilities may consider seeking further external advice if deemed appropriate.

### **What are the consequences of not implementing these health and safety measures?**

In addition to employee/user loss of confidence in the facility, failure to implement appropriate health and safety measures carries serious legal risks for not just the company/facility, but also its officers. Ultimately, the obligation is on the facility to demonstrate that it did all that could be reasonably expected of it in the circumstances.

## **Work Safely Protocol**

COVID-19 National Protocol for Employers and Workers

Please refer to the Government's most recent [Work Safely Protocol](#) which covers general return to work protocols. The following requirements, among others, are included in the Protocol. Each workplace will appoint at least **one Lead Worker Representative (LWR)**, who will work with the employer to ensure that COVID-19 measures are strictly adhered to in the workplace.

- There should be an appointed LWR onsite at all times
- Before a workplace reopens, there will be COVID-19 induction training for all workers to make sure that they are aware of Public Health Advice and Guidance. Paramount to this training is an understanding of the symptoms of COVID-19. Common symptoms of coronavirus include:
  - A fever (High temperature of 38°C or above)
  - A new Cough
  - Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
  - Loss of change in your sense of smell or taste
- Employers need to advise staff that if they have any common symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus) that they need to stay at home, self-isolate and phone their doctor straight away. For further information [click here](#)
- Employers will issue a pre-return to work form for workers to complete in advance of returning to work. Please refer to the Work Safely Protocol (*D4. Pre-Return to work Measures*).
- Employers are also required to update their safety plans before reopening, in consultation with, and with the agreement of workers.
- The plan should include measures relevant to COVID-19, for example, physical distancing, the provision of hand sanitisers, tissues and clinical waste bags, clear procedures around hand washing and respiratory etiquette, and ensuring proper ventilation on site.
- Employers will keep their employee records up to date and also a contact log and update their records to facilitate contact tracing, this should be in line with advice from the Data Protection Commission.
- Employers should ensure their employee handbooks are updated to provide up to date information on sick pay and employee entitlements.
- **Employers are required to put a Response Plan in place**, address the level(s) of risk associated with various workplaces and work activities, outlining details of how they will deal with a suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace, to include a COVID-19 Lead worker or designated manager for the suspected case. Please refer to Work Safely Protocol (*D5. Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19 in the Workplace*)

- Employers must provide (where reasonably practicable) an area/room on the premises where any user or employee showing possible COVID-19 symptoms can be isolated away from other people. If possible the area should offer ventilation, tissues, hand sanitiser, disinfectant and/or wipes, PPE, gloves, masks and waste bags.
- Implement and maintain policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of workers who may have symptoms of COVID-19
- The employer must also carry out a full risk assessment of the incident to see what, if any, further action needs to be taken.
- Breaks and rest periods should be organised to facilitate social distancing.
- Organise workers into teams or pods who consistently work and take breaks together. The teams should be as small as is reasonably practicable in the context of the work to be done.
- Employers should recognise for some workers the risk is higher. If the employee is at very high risk they may be advised to cocoon. If an employee is high risk and must be in the work place, employers must make sure that they are supported to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from others at the workplace. However employers should enable such workers to work from home where possible.
- At all times 2 meters social distancing must be adhered to. On the rare occasion where 2 metre separation is not possible, alternative protective measures such as installation of physical barriers/plastic sneeze guards should be put in place and the wearing of face masks.
- Employers may implement temperature testing in line with Public Health advice
- The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has published a number of COVID-19 [templates and checklists](#) for organisations re-opening businesses which should be utilised.
- If employees or management in a workplace recognise that there is a potential outbreak in the workplace management should alert the Department of Public Health.

### **Communicating with employees**

Identifying the communications co-ordinator to disseminate your communications plan in line with business needs and the business continuity plan. Employers should ensure all managers and staff are familiar with employee handbook, company policies and relevant legislation.

Managers must be prepared to deal with these issues as they arise, and employees need to be clear about what is required.

The appointment of a communications co-ordinator will centralise the information and manage the resulting impact. This ensures that the business is aware of absences across the organisation, other operational issues and any problems with suppliers or other related issues, in real time. This will facilitate making informed decisions on the allocation of resources.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation have created a Business Continuity Planning Checklist which can be found by clicking [here](#).

## **GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR RE-OPENING**

### **Pro-Active Steps**

Employers need to be proactive to create a safe work environment and minimise the risk of the virus spreading. Measures may include:

- Carry out a risk assessment in each facility in accordance with HSA guidance. This should cover risks posed by the layout of the facility and using the facility.
- Install physical barriers and clear markings to ensure that contact between staff and users is kept to a minimum and to ensure that queues or bottlenecks do not form between users as they wait to use facilities. Floor markings should be used to ensure 2m physical distancing, for example at reception and within group exercise areas/gym floor or sports halls being used.
- Implement enhanced specific sanitation and hygiene measures (set out in further detail below).
- Avoid making close contact with people i.e. Do not shake hands.
- Display the advice on the COVID-19 measures in visible locations to ensure that staff and users are also adhering to what is required.
- Eliminate physical interaction between staff and users at all times.
- Appoint a COVID-19 Officer to monitor and champion adherence to protocols.
- Monitor and communicate all policies and information regularly with users and staff. Ensure that all information is available in a number of formats e.g. Larger Print, Text only, easy read also taking into consideration workers/users whose first language may not be English.
- Implement a procedure for incidences of reported cases of COVID-19 amongst staff and users of the facility, *as outlined in the Work Safely Protocol*

and NSAI workplace protection and improvement guide. Ensure consideration is given to people with disabilities and individuals with underlying health conditions *regarding the safe* entry and movement in your facility. Ensure you maintain access to accessible toilets and changing rooms.

- Ensure any assistive technology or specialist equipment is *working*. *If you are limiting* the amount of equipment, you need to ensure that inclusive *products remain available e.g. Lifts, hoists, induction loops, dual use fitness equipment* etc.
- A system for the scheduling and pre-booking of exercise slots should be implemented to facilitate monitoring of numbers and cleaning in advance of the next session beginning. Communicate any changes you have made to methods of payments within your facility/programmes.
- Contact tracing to be conducted by business to keep a contact log to facilitate HSE contact tracing in the event of a COVID-19 case in the workplace. This may be through the use of sign in sheets, clocking systems, visitor logbooks, delivery personnel details, third party service provider visitor information. This information should be stored securely, maintained centrally and readily available upon request. Such information may be requested by the authorities to assist with contact tracing.
- Protective screens and barriers in place at reception where necessary and operating new queuing approaches.
- Controlling the number of individuals that staff and customers interact with at any one time.
- High noise levels within a premises can impact conversation negatively and encourage customers to raise their voice to communicate thus encouraging possible transmission of the virus. There must be a restriction on noise levels within the premises.
- An audit of touch points should be undertaken before opening to reduce all contacts to a minimum.
- The use of pre-paid and contactless payment is preferable.
- The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has published a number of COVID-19 [templates and checklists](#) for organisations re-opening businesses which should be utilised.
- *Ireland Active have templates to accompany this document in the members area of our website.*

## **Staff specific measures**

- Update the Staff or Employee handbook to reflect COVID-19 measures;
- Roll out comprehensive staff training on the COVID-19 measures in advance of returning to work or commencing employment making completion of the training course a pre-requisite to work;
- Staff should be required to fill in a self-declaration questionnaire (as outlined in the Work Safely Protocol) regarding COVID-19, confirming the following:
  - that they are not showing symptoms of COVID-19;
  - that they haven't come into contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or have travelled to/from an affected area;
  - that they have read the COVID-19 guidelines/handbook and understand the risks involved and their role in minimising that risk
- Ensure the distribution and collection of that questionnaire complies with data protection obligations.
- Encourage staff to download the COVID tracker App. This can be downloaded for free from Apple AppStore or GooglePlay store
- Consider working hours and arrangements, which may include ways to limit the number of staff commuting at peak travel hours or staggering start and end times to minimise the risk of transmission;
- Consider arrangements for staff to work in teams to minimise risk and ensure business continuity in the occurrence of a case of COVID-19 in particular where staff had advised they are sharing accommodation.
- If your business has staff that travel for essential reason please ensure they follow government guidance.
- Employers should put in place support for workers who may be suffering from anxiety or stress.
- ◀ • Employers should provide workers with information on publicly available sources of support and advice and information about the prevention and control measures taken in the workplace to reduce the risk of infection.
- Employers should ensure workers are made aware of and have access to any business provided Employee Assistance Programmes or Occupational Health service.
- At all times 2 meters social distancing must be adhered to. On the rare occasion where 2 metre separation is not possible, alternative protective measures such as installation of physical barriers/plastic sneeze guards, wearing of face masks, providing PPE as appropriate and hand washing facilities, and other hand hygiene aids, such as hand sanitisers, wipes etc. that

are readily accessible so workers can perform hand hygiene as soon as the work task is complete.

- Each section of a facility must be assessed to decide what PPE is needed. Training on **how to properly use, apply, remove and dispose of all PPE is also essential.**
- Back of House areas must also be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Employees should follow the public health official advice and guidance including ensuring good hygiene practices, such as frequent hand washing and respiratory etiquette, to protect against infections and should seek professional healthcare advice if unwell.
- For more information visit [Health & Safety Authority website](#)

### User – specific measures

- Pre-booking (suggested this be online) to use facilities is essential. Also provide a booking system over the phone to allow individuals who prefer this method of communication.
- Participants arrive ready to train and leave immediately.
- Participants to agree to follow protocols/mask wearing when not exercising.
- Users should be required to fill in a self-declaration questionnaire regarding COVID-19, confirming the following;
  - that they have read the protocols for using the facility,
  - that they understand the risks involved and their role in minimising that risk
  - that they understand and acknowledge the risks involved;
  - that they are not showing symptoms of COVID-19;
  - that they haven't come into contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19;
- Users that have had COVID-19 in the past and recovered should seek medical advice before undertaking high intensity exercise.
- Facility users should be reminded of their responsibility around hygiene and good Covid-practices i.e. cleaning down machines after use, social distancing etc.
- Ensure the collection of the questionnaire complies with data protection obligations. Ensure that facilities provide this in a number of formats to enable a number of users to complete it.

- Remind users that if they become unwell during their visit they should present to a member of staff whilst maintaining physical distancing.
- Users should be encouraged to download the COVID tracker app. This can be downloaded for free from Apple AppStore or GooglePlay store.
- Be considerate of individuals who may need extra support or care when transferring to or from their wheelchair, changing clothing, use of equipment etc. Support where possible should be carried out by household members ideally, where Personal Assistants are required, use of PPE is recommended.
- Users should be advised to not attend if they feel unwell (COVID-19 symptoms) or have been told to restrict their movement/self isolate.

### Face Coverings (Government Work Safely Protocol)

- Face coverings should be used in crowded workplaces. In addition to this recommendation, consideration should be given to wearing face coverings in places or situations where it may also be difficult to achieve or maintain 2m physical/social distancing. This might include:
  - When entering and exiting buildings
  - Public access areas in buildings, including receptions/foyers
  - When moving throughout buildings to toilets, photocopiers, on stairwells etc.
  - Canteens and kitchen areas (prior to and after eating) or when using facilities such as boilers, toasters.
- Face covering/ masks should be worn in situations where it is difficult to practise social distancing. In a sports/fitness context this may be the case for example when spotting weights or providing assistance to a person with a disability.
- **The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommend people should NOT wear masks when exercising as masks may reduce the ability to breathe comfortably. Sweat can make the mask become wet more quickly which makes it difficult to breathe and promotes the growth of microorganisms.**

However, in circumstances where exertion is low or when in non-exercising areas (such as changing area, entering and exiting the facility) the wearing of a face-covering is advised as much as possible. Employers and workers should keep up to date with the latest public health advice and regulations in relation to use of face coverings. For further information [click here](#).

## Sanitation and Hygiene

It is recommended that systematic recording and documenting of cleaning takes place where appropriate.

- Facilities should ensure that users and staff clean hands entering and exiting the building;
- Ensure hand washing facilities, additional hand sanitiser stations (touchless where possible), antibacterial wipes and appropriate signage are in place, and check and re-stock these regularly.
- Ensure sanitisation stations are at entrance / exit building, exercise areas etc. and in all appropriate places. Ensure all sanitation stations are accessible and at an appropriate level for all users including people with disabilities.
- Undertake thorough cleaning before opening.
- Ensure contact/touch surfaces such as table tops, gym equipment, door handles and handrails are visibly clean at all times and are cleaned at least twice daily.
- Implement modified cleaning intervals for any activity / work areas. This applies especially for washroom facilities and communal spaces. Cleaning should be performed at least twice per day and whenever facilities are visibly dirty.
- Provide staff with essential cleaning materials to keep their own designated areas (for example wipes/disinfection products, paper towels and waste bins/bags).
- Provide increased numbers of closed bins for hygienic disposal of used wipes, cleaning material, and ensure these are emptied regularly throughout and at the end of each day.
- Ensure that high touch surfaces (e.g. sports equipment, counters, desks and tables) and objects (e.g. telephones, keyboards) are wiped with disinfectant regularly.
- Further information on cleaning in non-healthcare settings is available from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control [ECDC](#)
- PPE equipment including masks (in situations where it is difficult to practice social distancing) and gloves should be provided to staff, if government advice / HSA Guidance require it.
- Temperature checks for users may also have to be implemented if required by Government. We will issue further guidance on this if required.
- Water fountains should not be used.
- Legionella testing should be undertaken before re-opening. The [HSE has published a guidance](#) note on managing recreational water facilities during and after prolonged shutdown.

### **Cleaning after suspected case of COVID-19 on site**

General tips for cleaning/disinfecting rooms that persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 were isolated in:

- Keep the door to the room closed for at least one hour before cleaning. Do not use the room until the room has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry.
- The person assigned to clean the area must wear a face covering and PPE. They should avoid touching their face while they are cleaning.
- Ensure that the window is kept open while cleaning where possible.
- Clean the environment and the furniture using disinfected and cleaning cloths.
- Pay special attention to frequently touched flat surfaces, the backs of chairs, couches, door handles and any surfaces or items that are visibly soiled with body fluids.
- Place all waste that has been in contact with the person, including used tissues, and masks in a plastic rubbish bag and tie when full. Place the plastic bag into a second bin bag and tie it, then clean your hands.
- Once the room has been cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry, the room can be put back into use.
- There is no need to clean carpets (if present) unless there has been a spillage.

### **Cleaning of Communal Area**

- If the person spent time in a communal area or they used the toilet or bathroom facilities, then these areas should be cleaned. Once cleaning and disinfection have been completed and all surfaces are completely dry, the area can be put back into use.
- ◀ • Current evidence suggests that novel coronavirus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. Cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in community setting.
- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.

### **Waste Disposal**

All waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a normal waste bag. Tie the bag securely when it is three quarters full and place in a second bag and tie securely. The waste bag should be kept for 72 hours, and then thrown into the normal waste.

### **Suppliers of Goods & Services**

Management should contact suppliers for their COVID-19 process for deliveries and servicing. Suppliers should:

- Clean (wash and/or sanitise) hands before and after each delivery transaction
- There should be staggered delivery times so that not all suppliers arrive at the same time
- Recommend that where possible the driver should stay in his cab until loading or unloading has taken place
- Follow HSE guidance on physical distancing when picking up deliveries and passing deliveries to customers

### **Plant Rooms/ Air-conditioning/Ventilation**

It is important to maximise ventilation in areas where people are in close contact. While large droplets containing the virus will settle onto the surrounding surfaces within seconds, smaller particles can stay suspended for longer. Dilution of indoor air by opening windows and doors or using mechanical ventilation systems can lower the airborne concentration and remove these smaller particles from the air. Reoccupying workplaces should not, in most cases, require new ventilation systems but improvements to ventilation will help increase the quantity of clean air and reduce the risk of exposure to airborne concentrations of the virus. Ventilation refers to the movement of outdoor air into a building, and the circulation of that air within the building or room while removing stale air to improve the air quality. This can be achieved through natural means (e.g. opening a window) or by mechanical means e.g. HVAC systems.

- Plant rooms should be inspected to ensure they are working properly after a period of closure.

- The proper functioning of ventilation, air exchange, and dehumidification equipment of covered pools must also be checked.
- Adequate PPE should be provided for staff servicing plant rooms. PPE should be disposed of into a dedicated bin for safe disposal. **See the Work Safely protocol regarding PPE.**
- Natural ventilation through the introduction of fresh air into the workplace e.g. opening doors and windows. Cross-ventilation is a good option for window ventilation as it facilitates the quick exchange of room air for fresh air through widely opened windows opposite to each other where possible.
- Mechanical ventilation through the use of HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) systems. These provide comfortable environmental conditions (temperature and humidity) and clean air in indoor setting such as building and vehicles.
- According to the Government Work Safely protocol (v140521) switching off air conditioning is not required to manage the risk of COVID-19. However, as many air conditioning units just heat, cool and recirculate the air, it is important to check ventilation systems to ensure that there is an adequate supply of fresh air (from a clean source) and that recirculation of untreated air is avoided.
- Increasing the number of air exchanges per hour and supplying as much outdoor air as possible is recommended, either by natural or mechanical ventilation.
- Ensure that air conditioning filters are cleaned at regular intervals in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Further information on ventilation is available at [HPSC](#) and ECDC

### **General Physical distancing guidance**

A physical distancing assessment should take into consideration the activity being carried out and the requirement for bleed/buffer areas between individuals.

### **Reception Area**

- In the reception area, cleaning and disinfecting must take place regularly during the day and more frequently during busy periods. This must focus on

frequently touched surfaces especially counters, desks, equipment, communication devices, door release buttons, etc.

- Sanitisation station to be placed here. Ensure sanitisation stations are at Entrance / exit building, Ensure all sanitation stations are accessible and at an appropriate level for all users including people with disabilities.
- The sharing of office equipment should be avoided. Where shared equipment is necessary, it must be cleaned and disinfected after each shift or any time the equipment is transferred to another employee.
- Physical barriers such as sneeze guards/plexiglass and partitions can be useful, particularly in back of house areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain apart. These physical barriers need to be regularly cleaned and disinfected.
- Employees should have a self-sufficient workstation where possible, with an individual computer, telephone and all ancillary equipment.
- Debit/credit card machines must be moved to the front of the counter and cleaned and disinfected after each use. The use of cashless/contactless payment systems is recommended where possible. Online payment should also be considered.

### Canteens/Cafes/Meeting rooms

- Common staff areas should ensure that social distancing is maintained at 2m distancing. **\*Note this figure could change based on government guidance.** The rotation of staff breaks and bringing of meals to work should be encouraged.
- Virtual meetings should be undertaken where possible and otherwise social distancing maintained.
- Where it is deemed essential to have business/work related and educational/training activities in person, this should happen in line with the Work Safely Protocol. This includes physical distancing.
- In offices where meetings/consultations take place, the physical distancing protocol must be adhered to and entry numbers limited. Seats and tables of all visitors must be cleaned and disinfected after each visit.
- Once the meeting/course programme finishes, social gatherings of delegates must be discouraged.
- Cafes/restaurants should open in accordance government guidance/protocols. Failte Ireland Guidance [Click Here](#).

- Vending machines could be used with contactless payment, however regular cleaning will be needed in between and users should be provided with disinfectant and hand gel.

## **SPECIFIC FACILITIES**

### **Gym/Studio Areas**

- Social distancing of 2m should always be maintained. \* **Note this figure could change based on government guidance.**
- Ensure adequate ventilation, avoiding recycling of air to avoid possibility of infection, in accordance with HSE/HSA guidance.
- Carry out more frequent cleaning of surfaces and wipe downs of contact surfaces with single use disinfectant wipes or strong disinfectants and microfibre cloths.
- Users should not share towels, water bottles etc.
- All of the standard infection control guidance from the HSE should be heeded.
- Social distancing should be kept at 2m for people in the gym, classes and using equipment, which will likely mean reduced numbers.
- Spacing of exercise machines/equipment should be undertaken to ensure 2m distance in between equipment. An alternative may be to use every second piece of equipment or the closing of certain stationary equipment to ensure 2m distancing.
- Ensure any assistive technology or specialist equipment is working. If you are limiting the amount of equipment, you need to ensure that inclusive products remain available e.g. hoists, indication loops, dual usage fitness equipment etc.
- Equipment which is 2m apart should not be placed where exercisers are facing each other.
- Loose equipment such as dumbbells, kettlebells, free weights etc. should be used by one exerciser and cleaned in between each use by users/staff.
- People with disabilities and individuals with underlying health conditions should follow government advice regarding COVID-19. The facility may wish to employ specific dedicated hours for vulnerable users.
- Booking of time slots should be employed in order to enable safe management and recording of users in the facility.
- Where spotting of weights is being undertaken, face coverings should be worn.

### **Exercise Classes (When permitted by Government)**

- Exercisers/participants should not congregate before or after classes/activities, and facilities should design internal flows to reflect this (e.g. one way systems).
- Staggered start and finish times combined with appropriate entry, exit and traffic management protocols to limit the interaction of participants at any one time.
- Reduction in the overall duration of the activity.
- Activity should take place in a predefined area which is directionally signed.
- The space required in this area should reflect the nature and intensity of the activity.
- There should be in excess of 2m social distancing between each of the predefined areas.
- Additional ventilation through the opening of all windows/doors etc. (where available).
- Hands-on adjustments or physical contact during group fitness classes or personal training sessions should be avoided where possible.
- Spin bikes should be staggered and spaced 2m apart to avoid spray back.

### **Personal Training/Outdoor Fitness instruction**

- There should be no hands-on adjustments or physical contact during group fitness classes or personal training sessions.
- Ensure any assistive technology or specialist equipment is working. If you are limiting the amount of equipment, you need to ensure that inclusive products remain available e.g. hoists, indication loops, dual usage fitness equipment etc.
- Any demonstration of equipment should ensure social distancing is maintained and cleaning in between sessions.
- Details of each personal training session should be maintained to assist with any possible contact tracing.
- Pre-booking of sessions with a gap in between to allow for cleaning
- Outdoor fitness training in pods of 15 is permitted. Multiple pods of 15 can be put in place for an outdoor activity once there is sufficient space and there is no mixing of pod members, including coaches/instructors. ***\*Note this figure could change based on government guidance.***
- Adequate insurance should be in place for outdoor fitness.

## Swimming Pool Area

- Adherence to the appropriate chlorine guidelines (see [PWTAG technical notes in appendices](#)) will control risk from waterborne COVID-19 virus in pools as per guidance note by the HSE/HPSC.
- Recommended Pool Chemical Levels: Free Chlorine – min 1.5mg/l, pH- 7.0-7.4 (As per Swim Ireland Pool Operators Guidelines).  
Social distancing in pool areas should be maintained in addition to reduced capacity, with a maximum bather load on initial opening in line with Swimming Pool Safety Guidelines/PWTAG maximum bathing load). **\*Note this figure could change based on government guidance.** Changing room restrictions will also likely determine capacities.
- Family Swimming: Please note where a child is of preschool age or younger and requires FULL support from parent/carer, this pair can be considered as one unit for the purpose of bather load.
- Social distancing must be maintained with swimmers not within their household and staff at all times, the same principles apply for carers.
- Swimming lessons for children should only commence following a risk assessment and further protocols issued by government on children's group activities.
- Swimming/aquatics club and high-performance activities should be undertaken in controlled circumstances and in consultation with the pool operator.
- Swimming/aquatics club and high-performance activities should be undertaken in controlled circumstances and in line with Government regulations.
- Disinfection of Pool Equipment: Risk of infection should be assessed and the appropriate chemical and duration for disinfection identified along with equipment cleaning (PWTAG- [TN44](#)).
- Pre-Swim Showers are encouraged either at the facility or at home whilst maintaining the statutory physical distancing. Operators should provide soap dispensers in shower areas to encourage a 'wash' rather than a rinse prior to entering the pool.

## **Showers, Lockers and Changing Rooms**

- The requirements for social distancing need to be considered which will include a consideration of the size, style ('village style', group change etc) as well as the layout of changing rooms to determine changing room capacities, enabling social distancing to be respected by customers and time allocated for cleaning.
- To minimise the use of changing rooms and congregation, users should arrive to the gym dressed and should be encouraged to shower at home.
- Beach style changing for swimmers (swimming costume underneath your clothing) should be encouraged to minimise time in changing rooms.
- Lockers may be used to store bags but should be cleaned in between use. Spacing in between lockers or alternate use should be in place to ensure social distancing.
- Facility operators should consider encouraging users to reduce time spent in showers and changing areas and highlight that shower usage is only for the rinsing of chlorinated water after pool usage.
- Shower area to have clear marking indicating social distancing in communal shower area or the use of individual cubicles can help ensure 2m social distancing.
- Provide washing facilities and hand sanitiser in changing area.
- Shared facilities such as spin dryers and hairdryers should not be available.
- Social distancing should be adhered to in changing areas. Be mindful to provide accessible changing facilities for people with disabilities.

## **Guidance for towels or other washable items provided for users**

- Do not shake dirty laundry; this minimise the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.
- Set up systems to ensure safe segregation of clean and dirty laundry items and to prevent mix ups.
- Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can be washed with other people's items.

- Clean and disinfect hampers or other carts for transporting laundry according to guidance above for hard or soft surfaces.

### **Waterparks/Outdoor Water Activities**

- When Government permit the reopening of Waterparks social distancing in pool/slide areas should be adhered to in line with government guidelines.
- Cleaning procedures should be developed for handrails, climbing steps, slides etc.
- Queuing mechanism should be in place to ensure 2m social distancing.
- Seating on poolside indoors/outdoors should be removed where possible, and where required should be spaced at least 2m apart and should be booked in advance and regularly cleaned.

### **Children's Camps**

- Camps should be conducted in accordance with government guidance regarding indoor/outdoor children's activities.
- Health screening for coaches and participants to be included as per general operations.
- Ratios in line with national safeguarding guidance should be in place.
- Organisations should also have additional support/personnel on hand to ensure compliance with COVID-19 protocols and measures. Traditional models of camps will likely differ from previous years.

### **Sports Halls/Pitches/Outdoor spaces**

- Sports Halls and pitches could be re-purposed for fitness training ensuring social distancing can take place [**Note this could change based on government guidance**].
- Organisations should ensure that sports are carried out in accordance with government guidelines with respect to activities allowed. E.g. contact vs. non contact, within county boundary etc. As well as governing body specifications.
- Team and individual sports should be carried out in accordance with the relevant National Governing Body guidance/protocols [e.g. tennis, golf etc.].

## Sauna, Steam Rooms and Spa facilities

- Saunas, steam rooms and spa facilities are allowed open where the facility is allowed to open but should carry out a risk assessment and follow the public health guidance including limiting capacity (e.g. one user/same family group), social distancing of at least 2m being maintained, hygiene measures being in place, ventilation and regular cleaning in between use (if operators choose to re-open initially). If the risk cannot be limited to an acceptable level, the activity should not be undertaken. Steam rooms operate at a far lower temperature than saunas and are not warm enough to interfere with the lifecycle of the coronavirus, and as such are a potential source of contamination hence the risk assessment should take place.
- [See PWTAG Technical Note 47: Spa and hot tub technical operation after Covid-19 shutdown](#)
- ***Particular risk assessment is required for those facilities with changing room and shower areas, saunas, steam rooms, hot tubs/Jacuzzi and non-chlorinated indoor baths etc., these will require particular cleaning, effective ventilation and supervision***

The Irish Spa Association have a [detailed guidance document for spa operations](#) and are working with Failte Ireland in this regard.

## First Aid Responder/Pool Rescues

- First aid responders should follow guidance/protocols issued by the [HSA](#) and the [PHECC](#)
- First aid responders should be provided with additional training for the provision of first aid/medical attention with consideration for COVID-19.
- [Water Safety Ireland](#) and the [RLSS](#) have issued guidance/protocols regarding lifeguarding/first aid in pool areas. Please liaise with them for further guidance.

## **CONTINUING AND EVOLVING FRAMEWORK**

Facilities must be alert to the fact that this is an evolving health emergency, which will require agility and regular review in order to determine how best to manage and address health and safety issues. This framework document has been produced following review of existing guidance documents, papers and discussions with numerous national, international bodies and industry experts. These include the following:

The Health Service Executive (“HSE”), National Standards of Authority Ireland (“NSAI”), Health and Safety Authority (“HSA”), Health Protection Surveillance Centre (“HPSC”), Sport Ireland and other government agencies as well as our partners in Swim Ireland and Cara.

The document should be read in conjunction with any guidelines issued by those bodies, in addition to the NSAI document ‘*COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide*’ and Irish Government’s Work Safely Protocol; *COVID-19 National Protocol for Employers and Workers* **(and any other further workplace guidance that issues from the HSA/NSAI/HSE/HPSC)** which is referenced throughout this document. Further information will issue as phased opening progresses.

## **DISCLAIMER**

**This is a discussion document for the benefit of members. It is designed to guide and encourage dialogue for leisure centres and fitness facilities in Ireland in as safe a manner as possible. It is for information and guidance purposes only.**

**It is not legal advice or intended as a substitute for legal advice or any applicable government advice. It is also not a substitute for members / users carrying out their own full risk assessment and review. Ireland Active does not give a warranty or undertaking as to the safety or commercial or technical viability of the advice in this document. Ireland Active will not be liable for any losses arising (directly or indirectly) from the adoption or implementation of anything in this discussion document.**

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**APPENDICES**

- See Ireland Active [members area](#) for templates
- [Swim Ireland Return to Water](#)
- [Cara Return to Fitness and Leisure](#) for people with disabilities
- [Sport Ireland Guidance](#) on Return to Sport for people with disabilities
- [Sport Ireland Guidance](#) on Return to Sport for Older People
- [Age and Opportunity Guidance](#) on Return to Sport for Older People
- [Work Safely Protocol COVID-19](#) National Protocol for Employers and Workers

**PWTAG**

- [Disinfecting coronavirus](#) (Technical Note 44 – version 4 updated November 2020)
- [Reopening a pool after Covid-19 shutdown](#) (Technical Note 45)
- [Swimming pool technical operation after Covid-19 shutdown](#) (Technical Note 46)
- [TN46 supplementary note: Covid-Safe Pool Operation – An Update](#) (Technical Note 46-B)