



International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

August 7, 2020

The Honorable Governor Andrew Cuomo
Office of Governor Andrew Cuomo
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Physical activity saves lives and protects health. Health clubs have been helping more than 4.6 million New Yorkers live healthy lives for years—it's quite literally our life's work. We applaud the work you're doing to safeguard everyone from COVID-19, and fully appreciate the seriousness in New York right now.

Health and fitness clubs are part of the solution. Please stop treating us as the problem.

Yesterday, you said, “We know gyms are highly problematic,” and mentioned “nationally identified sources of increased infections.” When we asked to see the sources, what we received failed to show gyms are “highly problematic.”

On behalf of the more than 2,000 New York fitness centers—businesses employing nearly 90,000 of your constituents—we've gathered actual data that shows why New York's health clubs are ready to open safely and securely. You need to stop spreading the false information that clubs are a source of new infections or high-risk environments.

First, let us help clarify why the sources you are referencing do more to show you haven't read the data than they do those gyms are problematic.

The South Korea Study: Only Proves the Importance of Clubs' Social Distancing Guidelines and Increased Cleaning Protocols

There are four big red flags when it comes to this study:

1. The workshop in question took place a full two weeks before the Korean Centers for Disease Control (KCDC) recommended social distancing measures, and more than a month before officials closed South Korea gyms. Therefore, the cases identified in this study **predate** the extensive social distancing and other safety protocols subsequently adopted.
2. The study points to several key factors that contribute to COVID-19 transmission, to include dense population, confined space, and workout intensity. Fitness facilities the world over, including those in New York, have already modified their safety protocols to address these key factors.



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3. The study itself indicates that safety protocols and lower intensity activities may largely mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The study showed secondary transmission of COVID-19 in classes with 5 to 22 participants, in a 60 square meter room, during 50 minutes of intense exercise, but reported no cases in classes with fewer than five participants in the same space.
4. The study leaves out how many total people attended the referenced fitness classes. While the study says 54 fitness class students contracted COVID-19 from their instructors, it does not say what percentage of total class attendees these 54 people represent. Reporting that 54 out of 60 group exercise attendees contracted COVID-19 from their instructors is extremely different than 54 out of 500 attendees.

Cases Linked to Two Fitness Centers in Hawaii: Key Safety Protocols Were Not Implemented

These examples don't prove gyms are high-risk. They only show that **any business** that doesn't have guidelines and safety protocols is problematic. For the record, the vast majority of fitness centers across the country have successfully implemented social distancing guidelines and increased cleaning measures.

Stop evaluating clubs' risk based on cases where no precautions were taken. Instead, judge clubs' safety level on the guidelines and precautions in place. These precautions have been shared with you and your administration by IHRSA and many New York club operators..

The data we have suggests health and fitness clubs operating under appropriate guidelines are not higher risk environments for the transmission of COVID-19 than the restaurants, casinos, and other public spaces already open in New York.

5 Pieces of Actual, Relevant Data to You Can Use

1. Health and Fitness clubs categorized as 'medium risk' for contact intensity, number of contacts, and modification potential by Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. Source: [Public Health Principles for Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors](#)
2. Training facilities operating under appropriate guidelines, with good hygiene and social distancing measures (1 meter for floor exercise, 2 meters for high intensity), saw no increase in COVID-19 transmission. Source: [University of Oslo Independent Study](#). New York and Norway—both now and at the time of the study—have reproductive rates under one.
3. The data from reopened clubs across the country reinforce the results of the Oslo Study. As of August 7, a MXM survey, consisting of 23.8 million check-ins from 2,870 health and fitness clubs, reports a visit to virus ratio of 20,816 to 1, or put plainly, for every 100,000 visits 4.8 people later said they tested positive. This 0.005% occurrence rate only refers to people reporting a positive test. It does not mean they caught the virus at the club.



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4. Louisiana tracks data on [COVID-19 cases by setting](#). Of the 20 settings reported, as of August 7, gyms and fitness centers are in the bottom five. Bars (#2), restaurants (#4), and casinos (#5) are far riskier than gyms (#16).
5. In Arkansas, another state experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases, spread from health clubs is demonstrably low. Arkansas Governor Hutchinson reported that of 5,063 active cases, less than 0.2% had visited a health club prior to testing positive.

Don't Keep Clubs Closed, Instead Require Safety Guidelines

Requiring the implementation of safety guidelines would help protect club patrons' safety while enabling them to access important health and fitness services. Protecting the public and our employees and preventing the spread of COVID-19 is a goal we share with you.

Put aside assumptions and follow the data. You will see a consistent story, showing that health and fitness clubs operating under appropriate guidelines, such as those now in place, are not high-risk environments for the spread of COVID-19.

It has come to our attention that California and Arizona pausing or reversing health club openings have contributed to New York's hesitancy to open health and fitness clubs. As outlined above, the data showing club check-ins vs. reported cases and data from Louisiana and Arkansas contact tracing, suggest health and fitness clubs are not higher risk locations than other businesses for transmission of COVID-19.

Yes, California has experienced a surge of cases, and some outbreaks—defined as 3 or more cases linked to one location—have been traced to fitness centers. However, it is unclear from reporting whether those cases **were transmitted** at the fitness center, or simply occurred among members who contracted COVID-19 elsewhere. In fact, in [Northern California](#), social gatherings are a primary driver of rising case numbers, and in Massachusetts, where health clubs are successfully open, the governor is reinstating restrictions on social gatherings and enforcing bar closures to limit an uptick in COVID cases.

In New York, you have been much more measured in your approach and have provided more stringent guidelines for reopening the economy. As it has with other industry's guidance, we anticipate New York's guidance for health and fitness clubs to implement current best practices.

We request that you look to health and fitness clubs as partners during this pandemic. Your state's health and fitness clubs and their staff are focused and dedicated to improving their customers' health, playing an essential, critical role in the promotion and maintenance of mental, physical, and social health and wellbeing.



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Evidence shows that physically active lifestyles can improve immune system health and [diminish the risk of contracting some communicable diseases](#), including upper respiratory tract infections. Health and fitness clubs, through the promotion of mental and physical health, are an integral part of the solution to returning citizens to a state of good health.

Additionally, health and fitness clubs are uniquely positioned to help the state, by conducting accurate and efficient contact tracing. The club business model of members not customers revolves around access control. Clubs use a check-in system, which allows them to identify who is in the club, as well as the date and time they visited.

Other businesses cannot help the way health and fitness clubs can. Clubs know precisely who is in their facility, and how to contact them. This contact tracing ability should make clubs an ally in the state's efforts to keep New Yorkers healthy and safe during these challenging times.

Health clubs are sites of preventative health interventions and are ready, willing and able to be allies in New York's efforts to restore its residents' health. Let clubs reopen.

Thank you for considering our concerns. We welcome any comments and questions you might have to Jeff Perkins, Assistant Vice President of Government Relations, at jdp@ihsra.org or (617) 316-6722.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Joe" on the left and "Moore" on the right, connected by a single stroke.

Joe Moore
IHRSA President & CEO