



**KEY FACTS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF FITNESS ON
HEALTH OF AMERICANS AND THE STATE OF
FITNESS IN THE UNITED STATES**

October 2021



The assumption that health and fitness clubs are either a source of new infections or a high-risk environment for new infections does not stand-up to the data.

Relative Safety of Gyms & Fitness Centers

- Colorado has released [contact tracing data linking outbreaks to settings](#). Of 100,218 total cases linked to outbreaks traced, they have found 3,216 cases linked to bars and restaurants, 2,266 cases linked to offices, but *only 41 cases resulting from outbreaks linked to health clubs or fitness centers* in Colorado. Colorado opened health clubs and fitness centers in June 2020.
- These findings were affirmed by [an analysis conducted by the University of Oregon's Oregon Consulting Group \(OCG\)](#). OCG researchers looked for relationships between check in data based on 8.5 million health club visits in Colorado and publicly available contact tracing information. The analysis found no statistically significant relationship between gym attendance and COVID-19 cases.
- An industry survey conducted by MXM, consisting of 2,877 health and fitness clubs, reports a mere 1,155 COVID-19 cases out of 49.4 million check-ins as of August 7, 2020.
 - These findings break down to an occurrence rate of 0.002%.
- Louisiana tracks data on [COVID-19 outbreaks by setting](#). Of twenty-four reported settings—ranging from automotive to religious gatherings—gym/fitness centers rank 15th in COVID-19 cases.
 - This is well behind settings such as retail stores (#3), restaurants (#4), and industrial settings (#1) and even behind office settings and religious gatherings.
- Illinois tracks data on [COVID-19 outbreaks by location](#). Since July 1, 2020, only 1.30% of outbreaks in the state of Illinois have been linked to gyms/fitness/dance facilities. This is behind restaurants (3.25%), bars (2.02%) and office spaces (2.73%).
- In other states including Massachusetts and [Washington](#), where fitness centers are combined with other sectors like casinos, pools, beaches and hospitality, outbreaks attributed to those locations appear to make up a small proportion of total outbreaks.
- San Diego County, California reported [county-wide contact tracing data](#) over a period of two weeks, from October 25 to November 7 2020. Gym and fitness centers were responsible for only 0.5% of cases during this window.

- This is well behind settings such as offices/work at 34.3%, bars and restaurants at 10.1% and retail stores at 8.0%.
- A case control study published in the CDC's [*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*](#) found that people who tested positive for COVID-19 were more likely to have dined in a restaurant or have had close contact with COVID-19. There was no statistically significant association between COVID-19 test results and any other activity, including visiting a gym.
- Preliminary [data collected](#) as part of an ongoing study at the University of Florida found no detectable SARS-CoV-2 (the virus causing COVID-19) in the air at Gainesville Health & Fitness.
- Health and fitness clubs are uniquely positioned to help the state, by conducting accurate and efficient contact tracing. 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.
- New data from [the ukactive Research Institute](#) shows that, for every 100,000 visits to UK health clubs and leisure centers between April and August 2021, only one person tested positive for COVID-19 as non-gym goers during that same period were 160x more likely to test positive for the virus.

Physical Activity Impacts COVID-19 Severity and Outcomes

- According to research published in the [*British Journal of Sports Medicine*](#), people who achieved physical activity guidelines for aerobic and muscular strengthening exercise had lower risk of SARS-CoV2 infection, severe COVID-19 illness, and death from COVID-19.
- COVID-19 is a top modifiable risk factor for severe COVID-19. Research published in the [*British Journal of Sports Medicine*](#) found being consistently inactive more than doubled the odds of hospitalization and death compared to being consistently active. The odds of ICU admission were 1.73 times higher. Even being less consistently active was associated with benefits, including 20% lower odds of death.
- A [study](#) conducted at the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, Michigan found that, for people positive for COVID-19, the odds of hospitalization were lower among people with higher fitness levels.
- A [UK study](#) analyzing data on over 387,000 people found that individuals with the most unfavorable lifestyle factors (smoking, physical inactivity, and obesity) were four times as likely

as those with the most favorable lifestyles to have COVID-19. According to their analysis, unhealthy lifestyles could be attributed to 51% of severe COVID-19 cases among the population.

- A [study](#) conducted in Brazil which is still undergoing peer review, found that at least meeting global physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes moderate or 75 minutes vigorously actively each week was associated with lower prevalence of hospitalization after considering other factors like BMI and age.
- An Iranian [study](#) including 206 people found that people with higher levels of physical activity experienced less severe cases of COVID-19 compared to less active patients. Better diet quality was also associated with less severe bouts of COVID-19.
- In a study published in the journal [BMC Medical Genomics](#), researchers used genetic markers to assess obesity, alcohol use, lifetime smoking, and physical activity. They found a two-fold increase in risk of respiratory COVID-19 and COVID-19 hospitalization for people with obesity and lifetime smoking, and a five-fold decrease in risk of respiratory COVID-19 for people who were physically active.
- According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), people with physical inactivity related comorbidities including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, and obesity are at higher risk of developing severe COVID-19 illness resulting in hospital admission, ICU admission, ventilation, or even death.
- 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.
- Higher levels of regular physical activity [were associated](#) with 31% lower odds of a community-acquired infectious disease, and 37% lower risk of infectious disease mortality. Additionally, post-vaccine antibody concentrations were higher when linked to a physical activity program.

Widespread Closures Had Negative Effects on Physical and Mental Well-Being

- A study from [Boston University School of Public Health](#) found that depression rates tripled during COVID-19, going from around 8.5% pre-pandemic to 27.8%. One quarter of young adults (ages 18-24) seriously considered suicide in the 30 days prior to the survey. [CDC](#).

- A [survey conducted by RunRepeat](#) found that, out of over 19,000 people surveyed, roughly 35% of people globally had gained weight during COVID-19 restrictions, with 71% gaining more than five pounds (2.2 kilograms).
- Substance use has also increased. Forty [states reporting](#) an increase in opioid-related mortality. A [Baptist Health survey](#) found a 55% increase in alcohol use and a 36% increase in illicit drug use.
- US [data](#) shows health clubs are an important part of consumers' lives, and contribute significantly to their mental and physical health.

Vaccines are an Effective Tool to Prevent 2020's Widespread, Severe Outbreaks

- According to the [CDC](#), all vaccines currently approved for EUA in the U.S. are effective against asymptomatic COVID-19, as well as severe disease, hospitalization, and death.
- According to a [Kaiser Permanente](#) review of data from 25 states, 9 out of 10 COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths come from people who are not vaccinated or only partially vaccinated. The rate of breakthrough cases among vaccinated people was less than 1% in the reporting states.
- The University of Maryland Medical System notes that vaccines can help stop new variants, as slower transmission of COVID-19 provides fewer opportunities for the virus to evolve. Lawmakers should focus their efforts not on closing businesses, but on promoting and facilitating vaccine uptake to reach herd immunity.