

The Personal Trainer's Guide to COVID-19 and the Gym



INTERNATIONAL
SPORTS SCIENCES
ASSOCIATION

table of contents

Coronavirus, the Gym, and Your Personal Training Business	3
• What Health Officials Recommend	4
• If Your Client Starts to Feel Sick	5
• Should You Suspend Workout Classes Due to an Outbreak?	6
• What We Know About the Coronavirus Spread	6
• The Bottom Line on Going to the Gym During the Developing Coronavirus Situation	6
Common Communicable Diseases at The Gym	7
• The Most Common Communicable Diseases at the Gym — Signs and Symptoms	8
• Protecting Clients from Infections at the Gym	10
• For Gym Owners, Managers, and Trainers	11
How to Effectively Clean and Disinfect Your Gym	12
• Policies Shape Cleanliness	13
• Encouraging Users to Clean and Disinfect Gym Equipment	13
• Regular Cleaning of Gym Equipment and High-Traffic Surfaces	14
• Doing a Deep Clean of the Gym	14
• The Best Cleaners and Disinfectants for Gyms	15
Safe and Effective DIY Disinfectants for Your Gym	16
• Should You Make Your Own Cleaners or Rely on Commercial Products?	17
• Easy DIY Disinfectants to Try	17
Tactics to Keep Your Gym Healthy and Successful	20
• Cleaning, Disinfecting, Sanitizing, Oh My!	21
• Social Distancing	21
• Updated Precautions	22
• Getting Customer Feedback	25
• The New Normal	25

Coronavirus, the Gym, and Your Personal Training Business



What do you need to know about the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak when it comes to working out at the gym? More specifically, how can you keep clients safe and healthy amidst concerns of this or other infectious diseases, preferably without scaring them or causing them to give up on their fitness goals? Here's what you need to know.

WHAT HEALTH OFFICIALS RECOMMEND

There are a number of actions you can take to help protect public health and reduce the spread of the coronavirus and other infectious diseases. These break down into four basic categories: environmental, cleaning practices, suggestions for staff, and client-based recommendations.

Environmental

The key to keeping your gym safe and healthy for your clients is to make it harder for germs to survive. Here are a few ways to achieve this goal.

- **Install “Wash Your Hands” signs.** Washing your hands regularly (with soap) is one of the most effective ways to keep the coronavirus from spreading. Yet, one [YouGov](#) poll reports that roughly 40 percent of Americans don't take this necessary step after using the bathroom. Installing a sign in your gym's restrooms can help remind them to take this important action.
- **Install hand sanitizer stations.** It's also helpful to install hand sanitizer stations in various spots around the gym. Will hand sanitizer prevent you from getting the coronavirus? The CDC reports that, while it isn't as good as soap and water, using a sanitizer that is at least 60 percent alcohol is the next best option. It won't kill all the germs on the hands, but it can help reduce them.
- **Install disinfectant wipe dispensers.** Because multiple people use gym equipment, it's important to clean it often. Installing disinfectant wipe dispensers is one solution. This enables staff and clients to easily wipe it down before and after use.

Cleaning Practices

The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) says they're not sure how long COVID-19 can survive on surfaces. However, the estimate is anywhere from a few hours to several days. How do you keep these and other germs from spreading?

- **Wipe down gym equipment often.** Because the coronavirus has a long incubation period, it's impossible to tell who may be infected. Though clients should be encouraged to wipe down gym equipment before and after use, it is also beneficial to have staff perform regular cleanings throughout the day as well. Be sure to pay special attention to the areas where clients typically place their hands.
- **Do a more thorough cleaning at night.** If the gym is busy during the day, it may be difficult to do a good clean. In that case, save this type of thorough cleaning for the nighttime, when your facility isn't as full.

Helping Staff Reduce Coronavirus Spread

Since the virus spreads from person to person, educating staff as to how to stop this spread is key. This includes:

- **Tell them to stay home if they feel sick.** The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) recommends that businesses “[actively encourage sick employees to stay home](#).” This begins with creating policies that make this okay. It also involves helping them recognize coronavirus symptoms. The WHO shares

that the most common are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Other flu-like symptoms may also appear, such as aches and pain, sore throat, congestion, and diarrhea.

- **Encourage the practice of good health habits.** Help your staff keep the virus at bay by reminding them to wash their hands regularly. Also, clean all gym equipment before and after training sessions. Staff meetings and memos are good ways to reinforce these habits.
- **Allow your personal trainers to go outside the gym.** Giving your personal training staff permission to train their clients off the premises may make clients feel more comfortable until the coronavirus spread slows. Trainers can organize [boot camps](#) and other [outdoor workouts](#) anywhere, from the gym parking lot to local parks or even the [city bike trails](#). Be a bit flexible until the virus is more under control. You can reduce risks while still keeping clients active.

Client-Based Recommendations

While you can't make clients wash their hands or use sanitizing solution, there are still a few actions you can take to help them reduce the risk of contracting the coronavirus.

- **Encourage them to engage in healthy habits.** The healthier clients are, the better their ability to avoid becoming a victim of the outbreak. This means eating healthy foods, exercising regularly (which also [reduces inflammation](#)), getting enough rest, and watching their stress.
- **Remind them to “wash your hands.”** This reminder may be by putting up signs or it could be simply by being a good role model. When they see your staff wash their own hands regularly, they may be more likely to do the same.
- **Remind them to wipe down equipment.** Getting rid of the virus is the only way to keep it from spreading. So, remind your clients to wash down the gym equipment before and after use.
- **Recommend at-home workouts.** If a client is concerned about the coronavirus, suggest that they work out at home. Create a program they can use without equipment or encourage them to [get more active with their kids](#). At least until the virus spread slows.

IF YOUR CLIENT STARTS TO FEEL SICK

If a client mentions that they feel sick, what do you do? First, it might be helpful to educate them about the symptoms of coronavirus. Also, remind them that it is flu season so feeling ill doesn't automatically mean they have COVID-19.

Either way, encourage them to follow CDC recommendations and stay home so they don't infect anyone else. And if they start to feel worse or have an underlying medical condition, suggest that they seek immediate medical treatment.

If they question whether they should continue to work out when sick, talk to them about [when it's okay to exercise and when they should rest](#). Namely, if their symptoms are above the neck (runny nose, sore throat, or congestion), it's okay to sweat it out. But if their symptoms are below the neck (body aches, coughing, or fever), they should probably take some time off.

SHOULD YOU SUSPEND WORKOUT CLASSES DUE TO AN OUTBREAK?

With the [NBA suspending their regular season](#) or other businesses closing for quarantine periods after a player or employee tested positive for the coronavirus, it may make you wonder whether you should do the same. Should you suspend all your workout classes and group exercise offerings?

Public health recommendations vary on this type of action. You may want to encourage more social distancing guidelines or suspend your classes be on the safe side. Review your local recommendations and figure out what works for your business and the safety of your clients.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS SPREAD

The WHO explains that the coronavirus “can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth.” These respiratory droplets are released when a person with the virus breaths out or coughs.

If someone inhales the droplets directly, they can contract the virus. They can also contract it by touching a surface or object that has been infected, then touching their own eyes, nose, or mouth.

The CDC adds that someone infected with the coronavirus is most contagious when symptoms are most present, but they can also spread the virus if they are not showing symptoms. Additionally, older adults and individuals who have serious chronic medical conditions are at the greatest risk of coming down with COVID-19.

THE BOTTOM LINE ON GOING TO THE GYM DURING THE DEVELOPING CORONAVIRUS SITUATION

In the end, is it safe for clients to work out at the gym until the coronavirus is more contained? The consensus seems to be that, as long as certain cleaning and hygiene processes are followed, it is. However, if there is any concern over this whatsoever, it may be more beneficial to offer other ways to work on their fitness until they're more comfortable returning to a public environment.

Keep in mind that, while in-person training sessions are great, online training can be equally as effective. Online training is the perfect way to expand your business and help more clients. Sign up for [ISSA's Online Coaching Certification](#) to jump start your success!

Common Communicable Diseases at The Gym



Gyms can potentially be hotbeds of germs and disease—it's not just the coronavirus you have to guard against. This is because people touch the equipment, sweat, breathe heavily, and do it all in an environment conducive to bacterial and fungal growth: warm and moist.

It may turn your stomach to imagine the possibilities, but while gyms naturally harbor microorganisms, they don't have to make people sick. If you are a gym owner or a trainer responsible for keeping clients safe, know what the common communicable diseases are, how to spot their signs, and how to avoid their spread.

THE MOST COMMON COMMUNICABLE DISEASES AT THE GYM – SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The types of diseases most often found in gyms and that can easily spread from one person to another may be caused by a fungus, bacteria, or viruses. Some are skin conditions, while others are respiratory infections. Know the basics about these diseases so you can prevent them and recognize the signs early if you do contract one.

Athlete's Foot

This is a fungal infection that also causes jock itch. A group of fungi cause these conditions and trigger a red, itchy rash. The skin may also become blistered or scaly and peel. The feet and groin are the most common areas for these infections, but it can also occur in the armpits and under the breasts.

Cold

The common cold is a group of viruses that cause an upper respiratory infection. While annoying, this is not a serious infection. It causes congestion, runny nose, coughing, sneezing, sore throat, headache, and a general feeling of being unwell or fatigued.

Coronavirus

COVID-19 is caused by a novel, or new, coronavirus. Because this is a new disease, symptoms are still being discovered. It most often causes coughing, shortness of breath, and a fever. You may also lose your sense of smell or taste, feel fatigued, get chills and muscle aches, and have a sore throat.

Flu

The flu is caused by the influenza virus. A new vaccine is required every year because the virus mutates and changes seasonally. Symptoms of the flu include fever, chills and sweating, muscle aches, cough, congestion, sore throat, headache, fatigue, and weakness. It is often confused with the cold, but the major differences are that the flu causes a fever and that it generally feels much worse. For most people, the flu will run its course, but for those with chronic illnesses or a compromised immune system, it can be serious and even fatal.

Hot Tub Rash

Also known as folliculitis, this rash is caused by bacteria that grow in pools and hot tubs that don't have the right levels of chlorine. An early sign of infection is a red, itchy rash around the edges of the swimsuit. As it develops, the infection can cause blisters around hair follicles. It should go away on its own, but see your doctor if it does not.

HPV

Human papillomavirus can cause infections through skin-to-skin or skin-to-surface contact. Most common in gyms are plantar warts. These are small growths on the bottom of the feet that may develop calluses. They are not serious and can be treated easily.

Pink Eye

Also called conjunctivitis, a number of things can cause this condition. In gyms, bacteria or a virus may trigger it. The symptoms are redness and itchiness in the eyes, a gritty feeling in the eyes, eye discharge, and tearing. This is highly contagious through touching affected surfaces and then the eyes. Treatment isn't usually necessary.

Ringworm

Ringworm is not caused by a worm, thankfully. This is a fungal skin infection. Unfortunately, though, it is highly contagious and can spread before an individual has any symptoms. The name of the infection comes from the main sign: a ring-shaped area of skin that is scaly and red. It may also be itchy, raised, and have red bumps in the middle.

Staph/Impetigo/MRSA

Staphylococcus bacteria cause staph infections, which can take many forms. In gyms, it is most likely to cause a skin infection with symptoms that include boils, a swollen, red area of skin that contains pus. It can also cause impetigo, a painful rash with blistering, or cellulitis, a deeper infection that causes swelling, redness, and discharge.

MRSA is an infection caused by a type of staph that has developed resistance to most antibiotics. It is more common in healthcare settings, but MRSA can be in gyms. It has similar signs to other staph skin infections but may also include a fever. A life-threatening MRSA infection is rare but possible, so it is important to monitor signs of skin infections and to see your doctor if they persist.

Stomach Flu

Known more accurately as viral gastroenteritis, this infection has nothing to do with influenza. It is caused by rotavirus and noroviruses. Stomach flu causes diarrhea, stomach cramping, nausea, vomiting, and in some cases a low fever, muscle aches, and headache. The biggest danger of stomach flu is dehydration. Some people need to be hospitalized to rehydrate with intravenous fluids, but most recover on their own in a few days.

PROTECTING CLIENTS FROM INFECTIONS AT THE GYM

There are some simple things you can do to prevent infections, both in yourself and others. For instance, remind people to skip the gym if they feel sick or have any kind of skin rash or infection. If everyone did that, it would cut down significantly on the spread of disease. Also, know how infections spread and practice good hygiene while at the gym.

Everyone appreciates good gym etiquette. [These are the top five do's of being a responsible gym user.](#)

How Common Communicable Diseases at the Gym Spread

Fungi thrive in warmth and moisture. Wet towels and sweaty gym clothes harbor the fungal spores that cause athlete's foot and ringworm, for instance. Wet floors can also contain fungi. Touch any of these things that are contaminated, and you could get the infection. Skin-to-skin contact can also spread the disease.

Bacteria, fungus, and viruses can all survive on surfaces for varying periods of time. When you touch a surface, such as a barbell handle, and then touch your face or body, you can become infected. Skin infections spread by getting into cracks, small cuts, or even hair follicles on the skin.

Respiratory infections can spread by touching surfaces or infected people, but also through the air. When someone with a virus coughs or sneezes, they spread respiratory droplets that others may inhale, causing illness.

What Clients Look for in a Clean Gym

Not all gyms are the same. All should take cleanliness seriously, but some do better than others. Before joining a gym, clients will want to tour the facilities and look for signs of adherence to hygiene practices: clean bathrooms and locker rooms, signs that clearly list rules and regulations, plenty of clean towels, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies readily available for wiping down equipment.

Take Smart Precautions—Clients and Trainers

Knowing how communicable diseases spread, you can take steps to lower your risk of contracting one. Even in clean gyms with solid hygiene policies, it is possible to spread disease, so always take these steps seriously:

- Avoid touching other people.
- Wear loose-fitting gym clothes that breathe and wick away moisture. [Here's the lowdown on what's best to wear to the gym.](#)
- Bring your own mat.
- Wipe down and disinfect gym equipment before you use it.
- Be aware of other gym users and give space to anyone who seems sick.
- If you have cuts or minor wounds, keep them covered.
- Avoid touching your face while working out.
- Wash your hands after working out.

- Wear flip-flops in the locker room and never go barefoot anywhere in the gym.
- Shower as soon after a workout as possible and get into clean clothes.
- Get a flu shot every year if you can.
- Talk to the gym manager if you have concerns about cleanliness or another gym-goer.

FOR GYM OWNERS, MANAGERS, AND TRAINERS

Gym members and clients must take responsibility for their own safety and health when working out. They should follow guidelines and rules and protect themselves and others through responsible practices. However, a big part of the responsibility also lies with the owners of gyms and employees. Take these steps to maintain a safe, clean gym:

- Have a set of policies and rules in place for cleaning the gym regularly.
- Set rules for clients, such as wiping down equipment after use or wearing shoes at all times.
- Display the rules prominently throughout the gym.
- Provide soap and hand sanitizer.
- Provide clean towels and disinfectants for cleaning equipment after each use.
- Disinfect high-contact surfaces several times a day.
- Clean the locker room and bathroom once a day.
- Set a schedule for staff to assign cleaning responsibilities.
- Keep a log for recording when everything has been cleaned.

Germs and communicable disease can be scary. Most are not dangerous or serious, but some are and can cause real health problems. Don't let this keep you or your clients out of the gym, though. For most people, the benefits of physical activity outweigh the risk of infectious disease. And, if you take the right precautions, are aware of symptoms, and see your doctor as needed, you can prevent getting sick or getting an infection.

If you love the gym, and germs can't keep you away, maybe you were destined to become a personal trainer.

[Check out the ISSA's self-guided, online program to become a certified personal trainer.](#)

How to Effectively Clean and Disinfect Your Gym



The coronavirus pandemic has sparked a lot of conversation about cleanliness, disinfectants, hand sanitizer, and other issues related to spreading harmful germs. Keeping clients safe is even more of a priority than ever.

If you're a gym owner or manager, make sure you understand and implement best cleaning practices. This is important not just to slow the spread of COVID-19 but also to prevent all those other infections: the common cold, the flu, and staph skin infections, just to name a few.

POLICIES SHAPE CLEANLINESS

A gym that runs smoothly and keeps clients happy and safe is one that is organized and has policies in place. You use schedules and training to ensure employees are in place to help clients, to run classes safely and on time, and to keep clients coming back. You also need policies for cleaning and hygiene. Make cleanliness a priority by using the same strategies:

- **Train employees.** Before expecting workers to clean and disinfect regularly, you must show them how to do it. Hold a mandatory staff training session to ensure everyone knows the best procedures for safely and effectively cleaning the gym and everything in it.
- **Create a cleaning schedule.** You can't just assume employees will clean regularly; you must be specific. Create a schedule for regular cleaning of fitness equipment, the gym floor, locker rooms and bathrooms, and all other surfaces. Assign staff to each task and time slot and keep the schedule somewhere everyone can easily access it.
- **Keep a cleaning log.** Each part of the gym that gets cleaned regularly should have a visible log for recording cleanings. Use wipe boards with dates, times, and tasks. Ask employees to initial the appropriate part of the log each time they finish an assigned cleaning task.
- **Organize inventory and ordering.** Keep track of each type of cleaner and cleaning equipment with regular and updated orders to make sure you never run out.
- **Consider hiring a professional service.** Larger gyms can benefit from having a regular and dedicated cleaning staff. Whether they work for you or are employees of a cleaning service, use all the above tips to make sure the facilities are cleaned regularly and to your specifications.

ENCOURAGING USERS TO CLEAN AND DISINFECT GYM EQUIPMENT

Just one use of gym equipment leaves behind sweat and plenty of germs. It's important to wipe down machinery after every use in a commercial gym where so many people come through the doors every day. Your staff may not be able to keep up with it, so to maintain sanitary conditions put strategies in place to encourage users to wipe down after every use of a piece of equipment:

- Make regular wipe downs a part of membership policy.
- Also include a policy for consequences, such as warnings or even revoked membership, after repeated offenses.
- Leave disinfectant wipes or a disinfectant spray cleaner and fresh towels within easy reach of exercise equipment so there is no excuse not to do it.
- Station hand sanitizer throughout the gym to encourage good hygiene.

Wiping your sweat and germs from the exercise machine or yoga mat is just one part of [good gym etiquette](#).

REGULAR CLEANING OF GYM EQUIPMENT AND HIGH-TRAFFIC SURFACES

Anything that gets touched every day should be cleaned every day, and some things need to be cleaned multiple times per day. Scheduling and implementing cleaning are just part of the battle. You also need to know how to do it right.

How to Clean and Disinfect

There is a right way and wrong way to clean and disinfect any part of your gym. If you are not relying on a professional gym cleaning service, know the steps to take to protect yourself and to clean effectively:

1. Wash your hands thoroughly before cleaning. Use soap and warm water and lather for at least 20 seconds.
2. Wear personal protective equipment. At a minimum, use disposable gloves to clean but also consider eye protection and masks, depending on the situation.
3. If using a disinfectant wipe, use a wiping motion in the same direction every time. Let the surface air dry.
4. If using spray cleaners, let it sit on the surface for the recommended amount of time before wiping.
5. When cleaning is finished, remove and dispose of gloves and wash your hands again.

Always read the instructions on a cleaning product before using and follow them accordingly.

Clean and Disinfect Your Gym's High-Contact Areas Daily

High-contact surfaces should be cleaned every day at a minimum. Gym equipment that clients touch with their bodies should be cleaned multiple times per day. High-contact surfaces include doorknobs and light switches; handles on exercise machines, barbells, and weights; foam rollers; stability balls; rubber flooring; and anything else people touch throughout the day.

Cleaning the Bathrooms and Locker Rooms

High-contact surfaces in these areas—door handles, faucet handles, toilet seats, and toilet handles—should be cleaned more than once per day. Everything else, including toilet bowls, sinks, and floors, can be cleaned once per day.

Don't Forget the Office and Front Desk

It's important to focus on the workout equipment that people touch all day long in the gym, but don't forget other high-contact surfaces and items. At least once daily, clean and disinfect the front desk, keyboards and tablet screens, the phone and keypad, and anything else that gets touched in the office. If clients use touchscreens to sign in or log workouts, clean these multiple times per day.

DOING A DEEP CLEAN OF THE GYM

Your gym cleaning strategy should include regular deep cleanings that take place when there are no clients. This could be overnight or on a day that you close for the express purpose of cleaning or staff training.

As you open after something such as the COVID-19 pandemic, do a deep clean. Assume the virus is in your gym,

even if you don't know of anyone who got sick there. This is a good opportunity to rely on a professional service if you can afford it. If not, make sure the space is well ventilated as you clean, use protective gear, and use cleaning products recommended for disinfecting. Also follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for a thorough, deep clean.⁽¹⁾

THE BEST CLEANERS AND DISINFECTANTS FOR GYMS

Cleaning your gym regularly and thoroughly will mean nothing if you don't use the right cleaners. You need products that are proven to kill most germs, including bacteria, viruses, and of course the new virus that causes COVID-19.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lists approved cleaners for disinfecting. List N includes all the cleaners that are effective in battling the coronavirus.⁽²⁾ Use one or more of these wipes, sprays, or concentrates for a deep clean ahead of reopening.

Some of these cleaners are irritating and may trigger asthma attacks or skin reactions. Always use them as directed on the label to lower the risk of a reaction and to ensure you are truly disinfecting. Wear protective gear while cleaning and open windows or run fans for ventilation.

As you open back up, [make sure you understand how to keep clients and employees safe](#). A deep clean, rules for clients and employees, the right disinfectants, and stricter policies will help prevent the spread of the virus and keep gyms open.

Does your healthy lifestyle inspire others to exercise more? Take it one step farther by turning your passion for health and fitness into a successful career. The [ISSA Certified Personal Trainer Self-Guided Study Program](#) is the perfect way to jumpstart your personal training journey to help more people reach their goals!

Sources

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, April 28). Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html?deliveryName=USCDC_2067-DM26911
2. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2020, May 5). List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2. Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

Safe and Effective DIY Disinfectants for Your Gym



Whether you run or work at a large gym, a small boutique studio, or out of your own home, keeping equipment and other services clean is essential for preventing illness and disease. Gym equipment gets touched, a lot. And, we all know that not all fitness enthusiasts stay home when they feel unwell.

Keeping clients safe is about more than just preventing injuries. You also have a responsibility as a trainer to protect clients from each other's germs. Reasonable measures to clean and disinfect will protect them and you.

But do you have to rely on commercial products, like bleach and other harsh chemicals? Not necessarily. Try some of these DIY disinfectants, both for gym equipment and at home.

SHOULD YOU MAKE YOUR OWN CLEANERS OR RELY ON COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS?

When cleaning gym equipment and surfaces, it is important to strike a balance between effective disinfecting and additional health hazards posed by cleaners.

Commercial Cleaners Pose Health Risks

The CDC, while recommending regular cleaning with products that can kill bacteria and viruses, also acknowledges that these cleaners can cause health problems. Bleach, for instance, can irritate the skin and eyes, and even asthma.⁽¹⁾

Commercial cleaners, like those containing bleach, are effective at reducing the concentration of germs. If you are going to use them, follow instructions and use protective equipment, like gloves, a mask, and safety glasses.

Avoid These Risks of DIY Disinfectants

If you do choose to make your own homemade cleaner, avoid mixing things together without following a recipe. There are some risks of doing so. For example, these [cleaner combinations can be problematic](#):

- Bleach and vinegar mixed together create a gas that is irritating and harmful.
- Bleach and ammonia also combine chemically to make a harsh, harmful gas.
- Bleach with rubbing alcohol produces chloroform and hydrochloric acid, dangerous, corrosive chemicals.
- Vinegar mixed with hydrogen peroxide creates a severe irritant, peracetic acid.

EASY DIY DISINFECTANTS TO TRY

There are many reasons to choose alternatives to the harsh chemicals commonly used to clean and disinfect gyms. Sometimes supplies are hard to find. And commercial cleaners can cause irritation to skin, lungs, and eyes.

Here are a few recipes for DIY cleaners that have disinfecting capabilities. In some cases, the risks of using an inadequate cleaner, such as during the coronavirus outbreak, may outweigh the benefits of a DIY product. Use caution and if in doubt about effectiveness, use a proven sanitizing cleaner.

The only DIY ingredients that truly disinfect are 70 percent (or higher) alcohol and 3-to-6 percent hydrogen peroxide. Your regular household bleach will also disinfect, but it is much more irritating and is already the base cleaner in many commercial products.

Rubbing Alcohol

That bottle of rubbing alcohol in your first aid kit can disinfect surfaces as long as it is at least 70 percent. Make reusable disinfecting wipes you can use once and wash to avoid waste. Cut rags or old t-shirts into wipe-sized pieces for your disinfectant wipe. Soak them in rubbing alcohol and store in a sealed container. Use these to wipe down any hard surface. There is no need to wipe excess moisture off the surface, as the alcohol will evaporate. When it's time to wash the wipes, use the hot water setting.

You can also make a DIY disinfectant spray cleaner by mixing rubbing alcohol with some antibacterial dish soap and water. Fill a spray bottle with one-third of each. Use it as you would any other disinfectant spray cleaner: wet the surface to be cleaned and wipe off with a rag or paper towel. This won't be as effective as the wipes, but it does make a good DIY cleaner for some services.

Hydrogen Peroxide

Alcohol is safe but can still be harsh on the eyes, skin, and airways. Less irritating is hydrogen peroxide, another first aid staple. It's an effective disinfectant too, just be sure to look for formulas concentrated between three and six percent. To make a DIY disinfecting spray, simply put it in a spray bottle. Spray surfaces and let it sit for about five minutes before wiping clean. Be aware that hydrogen peroxide can break down finishes on surfaces with prolonged use.

White Vinegar

Vinegar is a great natural cleaner that is much less irritating than commercial cleaners. It disinfects to some degree, but don't rely on it to eliminate all bacteria or any viruses. Use basic white vinegar full strength to wipe down surfaces. You can also dilute it with water for a less potent cleaner. Just add to a spray bottle and use as you would any cleaner. Be aware that, as an acid, vinegar may damage some surfaces. Test it out on a small, out-of-the-way spot first.

Essential Oil Disinfecting Spray

Many essential oils have disinfecting properties, such as tea tree oil, but don't rely on these for heavy-duty anti-viral cleaning programs. There is some evidence they have anti-viral properties, but don't rely on these to protect you from stomach flu or coronavirus. Here's a good recipe for a cleaning product that may disinfect to some degree:

- One quarter cup white vinegar
- Three quarters cup water
- Seven drops of lavender essential oil
- Seven drops of tea tree essential oil

The recipe can be scaled up for bigger batches. Other essential oils to try include peppermint, any type of citrus, geranium, and rosemary.

Make Your Own Hand Sanitizer

Cleaning the equipment regularly is essential, but also important is good hygiene and hand washing. Keep hand sanitizer in strategic locations to encourage regular use in the gym. And, if you can't find any hand sanitizer in the stores, consider making your own. The following homemade hand sanitizer recipe is approved by the World Health Organization.⁽²⁾ You need:

- Ethanol (96 percent) or isopropyl alcohol (99.8 percent)
- Hydrogen peroxide (3 percent)
- Glycerol
- Sterile or boiled water

To a ten-liter container, add 8,333 mL of ethanol or 7,515 mL of isopropyl alcohol, 417 mL of hydrogen peroxide, and 145 mL of glycerol. Fill to the 10-liter mark. Close and shake the container to mix. You can then dispense it into smaller containers.

DIY disinfectants are easy to make, and you probably have the ingredients you need in your kitchen, cleaning cabinet, and first aid kit. These are great for when you're in a bind trying to find cleaners or you just want an alternative way to clean gym equipment. When protecting clients from germs, be sure you are using a cleaner that will truly disinfect a surface. Some natural cleaners aren't effective enough, but they do clean surfaces and make disinfecting easier.

Gathering insight from exercise, health, and nutrition experts is an important part of developing successful programs. The ISSA offers a wide variety of [specializations](#) to help you boost your training business.

Sources

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019, January 24). Athletic Facilities. Cleaning and Disinfecting. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/environment/athletic-facilities.html>
2. World Health Organization. (2010). Guide to Local Production: WHO-Recommended Handrub Formulations. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Guide_to_Local_Production.pdf

Tactics to Keep Your Gym Healthy and Successful



Fitness studios and gyms are assaulted daily by germs, fungus, and disease simply due to the high volume of people that move through them. Even without considering the disease pandemic of 2020, common pathogens like the flu make the rounds all year long with seasonal increases typically in the fall and winter months. The average American adult catches a cold 2 to 4 times per year!

Whether you work in a fitness facility or gym, own one, or just visit one for your workouts or exercise classes, staying clean and healthy is a top priority. In the wake of COVID-19, workout facilities are taking extra precautions to ensure high contact areas and equipment stays clean and prevent the spread of illness.

CLEANING, DISINFECTING, SANITIZING, OH MY!

There are many ways to clean a fitness facility whether by staff or gym-goers as they move through the space. However, just cleaning is not enough! The use of disinfectants and sanitizers to eliminate and kill germs and viruses is a necessary second step. For clarity, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines each as follows:

Cleaning - Removing dirt and impurities from surfaces or objects with a detergent (like soap) and water. Cleaning does NOT kill germs, but it removes them and lowers the risk of spreading infection.

Disinfecting - Killing germs and viruses on surfaces or objects with the use of chemicals. Disinfecting does not necessarily remove the germs from the surface when it kills them, but it lowers the risk of infection.

Sanitizing - Cleaning and killing germs on surfaces or objects enough to bring the microbe level to an acceptable range.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Outside of cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing, health professionals have recommended social distancing. This practice of creating space between individuals with the aim of preventing the spread of disease is nothing new. It originated in the Middle Ages to slow the spread of the plague and has only really been employed a few times since. The more populous an area, the more challenging social distancing becomes. However, it has been found to be effective in conjunction with cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

Heavy breathing, coughing, and sweating are all things that can accelerate the spread of disease and they happen constantly in a fitness environment. People who remain socially distant reduce their risk of either sharing or encountering infectious bodily fluids.

Face Coverings and Gloves

Along the lines of social distancing are the introduction of face coverings. Referred to as PPE, or personal protective equipment, these have been used in Asian countries to prevent illness related to smog and air

pollution, but the current pandemic has made them more applicable than ever. From face shields to cloth or disposable masks, face coverings are more readily available to the public and generally protect the public more than the user. This is because the mask wearer is unable to spread aerosol particles through coughing, sneezing, or heavy breathing.

Personal trainers, exercise class instructors, and group exercise leaders are now seen wearing masks while teaching or instructing and have the responsibility of wiping down all equipment and their space before the subsequent class or before leaving for the day.

Gloves are worn by health care professionals regularly but are now a staple in most fitness facilities. Whether scanning members in, accepting money, cleaning, or where there is a possibility of physical contact, many employers are supplying all employees with gloves to protect themselves during their work shift.

UPDATED PRECAUTIONS

Gyms have begun to implement updated precautions regarding the cleaning of high contact spaces and equipment. While there is no right or wrong way to go about cleaning, there are general guidelines that most facilities are taking.

Employee Health and Hygiene

The employees that have chosen to return to work after the pandemic shutdowns of fitness facilities are taking a great risk. They are near and in contact with many people throughout their workday. Employers have begun to provide the PPE necessary to protect employees, but employees are also required to:

- Wash hands upon arrival to work, after working closely with others, after touching their PPE, after using the restroom, and before leaving work
- Wear PPE and physically distance when possible
- Carry a towel and cleaning solution with them at all times

Streamlining Facility Protocols

Fitness facilities have instituted some best practices to ensure they are doing their part to protect their employees and the public. Many fitness facilities and gyms have done the following:

- Created audits and checklists for cleaning duties
- Hired staff specifically for cleaning and disinfecting
- Implemented the use of tags to establish equipment that is clean and ready for use
- Increased the number of wipe or sanitation stations
- Increased the frequency of cleaning for locker rooms and bathrooms
- Begun to clean air conditioning vents daily
- Limited payments to contactless options (like a credit card, PayPal, online, etc.)
- Provided staff trainings on disease control and cleaning protocols

Staff Cleaning

Staff tasked with cleaning gyms and studios often arrived and cleaned after hours in the past. Now, more staff are being hired expressly for cleaning and sanitizing facilities at all hours of the day. The fact is that guests and gym-goers will never do as thorough of a cleaning job as is required to be effective. Staff are paid to do so. It starts in the space where the cleaning supplies are kept. Many facilities have tidied up the maintenance closets and cleaned them from top to bottom to remove and prevent bacterial growth or virus harboring.

Bathrooms and Locker Rooms

Outside of the usual hand washing after bathroom use, there is not much more being requested of customers in bathrooms and locker rooms. Staff at many fitness facilities are tasked with wiping and disinfecting bathroom counters, sinks, and stalls much more frequently than the old standard of once per hour (maximum). In some smaller facilities, the bathrooms may be available for customers, but showers, locker room areas, saunas, and steam rooms are closed to public use. The cleaning procedures for these spaces are extensive and difficult to complete in a timely manner.

Customer Cleaning

Spray bottles of commercial-grade disinfectants and paper or cloth towels have always been a staple at most gyms. They were usually accompanied with a polite sign requesting that members wipe down equipment after use. Despite being a great idea, most people did not adhere to the cleaning rules and it was seldom enforced in the past.

Now, gyms have added more cleaning stations throughout their facilities as well as hand sanitizing stations. The presence of signage regarding handwashing protocols and sanitation requirements has increased and some gyms even have staff monitoring the exercise areas to ensure cleaning takes place.

It is not a widespread practice to chastise or remove customers not following the rules, but the new expectations have been set. Most gyms will let it slide as to prevent losing a membership from an embarrassing confrontation and have, instead, introduced more staff to assist with the constant cleaning similar to the way self-serve kiosks are wiped after each use in grocery stores.

Reservations

Some gyms, CrossFit boxes, and studios have adopted a system of reservations. This includes some facilities that do not operate under a group fitness model. Members must reserve a workout time via the company's app or website and may only be admitted during that time. Often while inside, customers must still remain socially distant from other patrons.

Special Hours for Special Populations

Much like the precautions taken by grocery stores amid the COVID-19 outbreak, some gyms are offering specific hours or class times only for elderly or pregnant customers. During these hours, the eligible customers are still requested to remain socially distant.

For those who are immunosuppressed or have severe respiratory issues, the CDC recommends they not attend fitness facilities at this time as the risk of infections is still too high.

Limited Occupancy

Group fitness studios, yoga studios, and even large gyms are limiting the number of customers allowed inside the building. Group training studios like Orangetheory that can hold a full class of 35 to 45 people have cut back to classes of 12 to 15 to minimize the amount of equipment individuals have to share during class. Large gyms simply set a capacity (often including staff members to keep them safe) and will have patrons remain in a socially distanced line outside of the facility. Once full, for each person who leaves, one is allowed in.

Temperature Checks

Some gyms now perform temperature checks before admitting exercisers into their facilities. Fever or elevated temperature is a hallmark of most diseases as it is an uncontrollable immune response. It must be noted, however, that not all who are ill will have an elevated body temperature.

Current CDC recommendations suggest that any individual with a temperature of over 100 degrees is a risk. Fitness facilities and employers using temperature checks to monitor customers and staff will often allow a recheck of temperature after a 5-minute waiting period with a high reading. This helps to negate a false positive reading due to elevated skin temperature or any other cause.

Another common protocol for temperature checks is, after two high readings, to send a customer away for a period of 24 to 48 hours. They are allowed to come back for a recheck after that time and, if they still have an elevated temperature, they must wait for an extended period before returning. As a courtesy, most fitness facilities will pause a customer's membership until they return to avoid charging for a service they are unable to use.

Equipment Spacing

The space allowed between gym equipment becomes paramount when individuals are breathing heavily, sweating, and, potentially, releasing water vapor and aerosol particles. Some facilities with extra space have begun to rearrange and allow for 4 to 6 feet between pieces of equipment. In some cases, equipment must be completely removed to allow for the extra spacing, meaning the overall occupancy of a large gym, for example, will be greatly reduced.

When equipment cannot be removed, a fitness center may unplug or cover equipment that is too close together. For example, turning off every other exercise bike or covering every other weight bench to force social distancing protocol.

Removing Fans

While it seems counterintuitive to remove fans that circulate air and keep you cool during a workout, they also circulate aerosol particles from other people! Some gyms have resorted to turning off all fans (not inclusive of air

conditioning units) or, when possible, removing small fans from studio spaces. Smaller locations with windows or garage doors can open them to allow for more adequate air circulation when the weather is appropriate.

GETTING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Regardless of the precautions and cleaning standards a facility is utilizing, it is important that they ask for customer feedback. It is virtually impossible to ensure that every customer is following every rule regarding cleanliness in a fitness facility and this may make some patrons uncomfortable.

Many gyms are sending automated emails that trigger when the customer scans their key tag for gym admittance for the first time since reopening. Some have comment cards or in-house tablets for feedback and surveys, and others have staff and managers speaking with customers while they are in the facility.

The feedback they receive is critical. While no facility will be perfect, understanding the fears or concerns of the customers will allow fitness facilities to appropriately respond and take action to make people feel safe. After all, a customer that does not feel safe is likely to cancel their membership. Fitness is a membership and relationship business.

THE NEW NORMAL

The response to COVID-19 specifically was relatively swift and absolute. The way businesses and individuals proceed after the initial response will have a big effect on how communicable disease is treated and prevented around the world. The protocols and restrictions in place because of rapid disease spread are unlikely to disappear any time soon.

Fitness is an outlet for many people, and it allows us to remain healthy and active. Certified personal trainers are in high demand as staying healthy becomes a priority for a large part of the population. The industry remains in a growth state regardless of the world health events and it is up to those who run and work in the industry to keep gym members safe and protected. Are you ready to make a difference?