



Coronavirus  
**COVID-19**  
Public Health  
Advice

# **FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION WITH IRELAND ACTIVE MEMBERS COVID 19: Safe operation of Leisure Centres, Sport and Fitness Facilities**

**Ireland  
Active** | **Leisure, Health  
and Fitness  
Association**

**Version I: 12th May 2020**

## **CONTENTS:**

1. Introduction
2. Government's 5 Phase Roadmap
3. What you should Consider
4. Framework:
  - a. General Measures
  - b. Specific Facility Measures
5. Continuing and Evolving Framework
6. Disclaimer

## **I. 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 10,000 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

It is a framework for operation. It is not intended to be exhaustive advice or legal advice. It should be read in conjunction with all updated government advice and guidelines.

## 2. GOVERNMENT'S 5-PHASE ROADMAP

The government has published a [five-phase roadmap](#) to easing Ireland's COVID-19 restrictions. **Ireland Active is seeking further clarification regarding the detail of each phase**, and will update members in due course when clarifications become available.

This roadmap will only come into effect when the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) deems conditions are right for each phase. As of now, only workers in services that are deemed 'essential services' can return to work.

The five phases are each spaced three weeks apart. The main measures relevant to the leisure, sport and fitness sector are set out below:

### Phase 1 (May 18)

- Open outdoor public sport amenities (e.g. pitches, tennis courts, golf courses etc.) where social distancing can be maintained.
- Permit people to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities, either individually or in very small groups (maximum 4 people), where social distancing can be maintained and where there is no contact

### Phase 2 (June 8)

- Extend restriction to within 20km of your home
- Permit people to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities, involving small group team sports training (but not matches) where social distancing can be maintained and where there is no contact

### Phase 3 (June 29)

- Open playgrounds where social distancing and hygiene can be maintained
- Permit "behind closed doors" sporting activities events where arrangements are in place to enable participants to maintain social distancing
- Open cafés and restaurants providing on-premises food and drink where they can comply with social distancing measures and strict cleaning in operation

### Phase 4 (July 20)

- Open public swimming pools where effective cleaning can be carried out and social distancing can be maintained
- Travel outside of your region permitted
- Re-opening of hotels, hostels, caravan parks, holiday parks for social and tourist activities initially on a limited occupancy basis and then increasing over time, with social distancing. Hotel bars will remain closed

### Phase 5 (August 10)

- Sports that involve close physical contact, like rugby, boxing and wrestling, will resume
- Gyms, exercise, dance studios and sports clubs will be allowed reopen where regular and effective cleaning and social distancing can be maintained;
- Almost all restrictions lifted, apart from "large social gatherings";
- Indoor recreational venues, such as roller skating rinks, bowling alleys and bingo halls, will be allowed reopen with limited numbers, cleaning and social distancing in place.

### **3. WHAT YOU SHOULD CONSIDER**

You should begin thinking now about how you will manage the phased return to operation of your facility. The measures could be long term (e.g. 9-18 months).

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.

A site-specific risk assessment should be carried out for operation during COVID-19, and 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.

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 have been engaged with government to seek business support to allow commercial operations to become viable on re-opening.

Finally, facilities should consider taking specific advice on their specific duty of care and legal liability.

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 seek 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 in the circumstances.

## **Return to Work Safety Protocol- COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers**

The government published a [national protocol](#) (dated 8<sup>th</sup> May) 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, who will work with the employer to ensure that COVID19 measures are strictly adhered to in the workplace.
- Before a workplace reopens, there will be COVID-19 induction training for all workers to make sure that they are up to speed on the Public Health Advice and Guidance.
- Employers will issue a pre-return to work form for workers to complete at least 3 days in advance of the return to work.
- 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, social distancing, the provision of hand sanitisers, tissues and clinical waste bags, clear procedures around handwashing and respiratory etiquette, and ensuring proper ventilation on site.
- Employers will keep a log of any group work in order to facilitate contact tracing
- Employers are required to put a response plan in place, outlining details of how they will deal with a suspected case of COVID-19 in the workplace, to include a designated manager in charge.
- If a worker displays any symptoms of the virus during work hours, the designated manager must direct that person to a designated isolation area, along a designated route, all the time maintaining a 2 metre distance, and arrange for that person to remain in isolation before arranging for them to be transported home, or to a medical facility, avoiding public transport.
- 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
- In settings where 2 metre separation is not possible, alternative protective measures such as installation of physical barriers/plastic sneeze guards should be put in place
- Employers must implement temperature testing in line with Public Health advice

#### 4. 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 social distancing, for example at reception and within group exercise areas or sports halls being used.
- Implement enhanced specific sanitation and hygiene measures (set out in further detail below)
- 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 as much as is reasonably practicable.
- Appoint a COVID-19 Officer to monitor and champion adherence to protocols.
- Monitor and communicate all policies and information regularly with users and staff.
- Implement a procedure for incidences of reported cases of COVID-19 amongst staff and users of the facility, *as outlined in the national protocol and [NSAI workplace protection and improvement guide](#).*
- Special consideration should be given to those who are vulnerable or less able, particularly regarding use the lifts and all other staff use the stairs, or a one-person per lift rule could be implemented.
- A system for the scheduling and pre-booking of exercise slots should be implemented to facilitate pre-booking and cleaning in advance of the next session beginning.
- 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.
- *Ireland Active will seek to issue templates to accompany this document in due course.*

##### 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, making completion of the training course a pre-requisite to returning to work;
- Staff should be required to fill in a self-declaration questionnaire (as outlined in the national return to work 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.
- 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.

#### **User – specific measures:**

- Pre-booking (suggested this be online) to use facilities
- 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;
- Ensure the collection of the questionnaire complies with data protection obligations.

#### **Sanitation and Hygiene**

- Facilities should ensure that users and staff clean hands entering and exiting the building;
- Ensure hand washing facilities, additional hand sanitiser stations, antibacterial wipes and appropriate signage are in place, and check and re-stock these regularly;
- 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
- PPE equipment including masks and gloves should be provided to staff, if government advice / HSA Guidance requires 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 fonts should not be used.
- [Legionella testing](#) should be undertaken before re-opening.

## Suppliers

- 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

- Plant rooms should be inspected to ensure they are working properly after a period of closure.
- Adequate PPE should be provided for staff servicing plant rooms. PPE should be disposed of into a dedicated bin for safe disposal. See also national return to work protocol regarding PPE.
- According to the government return to work protocol; *air conditioning is not generally considered as contributing significantly to the spread of COVID-19. Switching off air conditioning is not required to manage the risk of COVID-19. For organisations without air conditioning adequate ventilation is encouraged, for example, by opening windows where feasible etc.*

## SPECIFIC FACILITIES

### Gym/Studio Areas

- Social distancing of 2m should always be maintained
- Facilities should plan for a maximum of 1 person/4 square metres\* (2mx2m) and in accordance with government advice on maximum capacities for indoor activities. **\*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.
- There should be no hands-on adjustments or physical contact during group fitness classes or personal training sessions.
- 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.
- Equipment which is 2m apart should not be placed where exercisers are facing each other.
- Spin bikes should be staggered and spaced 2m apart to avoid spray back.



- Loose equipment such as dumbbells, kettlebells, free weights etc. should be used by one exerciser and cleaned in between each use by users/staff.
- Vulnerable users 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 mandatory in order to enable safe management and recording of users in the facility.

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

- There should be no hands-on adjustments or physical contact during group fitness classes or personal training sessions.
- Any demonstration of equipment should ensure that 2m 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 should be allowed for.
- Outdoor personal training in small groups or one to one should ensure social distancing of 2m and one person/4sqm\* and comply with government roadmap ratios. **\*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](#)) will control risk from waterborne COVID-19 virus in pools as per the March 5<sup>th</sup> guidance note by the [HSE/HPSC](#). Social distancing guidance should also be followed (staying >2m apart) in and around the pool. This will likely result in reduced capacity in pools to circa 50%\* (e.g. lane swimming or small group lessons only). Changing room restrictions will also likely determine capacities.
- Social distancing in pool areas should be maintained with reduced capacity, with a maximum of 1 person for every 6sqm\* (i.e. a 50% reduction of the Swimming Pool Safety Guidelines/PWTAG maximum bathing load). **\*Note this figure could change based on government guidance.**
- Group swimming lessons for children should be only be commenced following a risk assessment and further protocols issued by government on children's group activities, as recommended by Ireland Active and Swim Ireland.
- Swimming/aquatics club and high-performance activities should be undertaken in controlled circumstances as outlined by Swim Ireland and in consultation with the pool operator.
- Saunas, steam rooms and spa facilities are recommended to remain closed until further government protocols are issued.

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

- Gym exercisers should come dressed and use showers at home in the initial opening.
- Lockers may be used to store bags but should be cleaned in between use. 2m spacing between lockers should be in place.

- Showers, changing rooms and lockers should only be used in limited circumstances for swimmers initially. One person per group shower area or the use of individual cubicles can help ensure 2m social distancing, in the case of swimmers.
- Toilets should be used with one person at a time, ensuring social distancing.
- Shared facilities such as spin dryers and hairdryers should not be used.

### **Waterparks/Outdoor water activities**

- Social distancing in pool/slide areas with 2m distancing should be adhered to and with reduced capacity as outlined above under swimming pools, further to later government guidance.
- Cleaning procedures should be developed for handrails, climbing steps, slides etc.

### **Summer Camps**

- Summer camps should only be conducted following further government guidance regarding numbers allowed for indoor/outdoor children's activities.

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

- Sports Halls and pitches could be re-purposed for group exercise maintaining social distancing of more than 2m and 1 person/4sqm\* [**Note this figure could change based on government guidance**].
- Team and individual sports should be carried out in accordance with the relevant National Governing Body guidance/protocols [e.g. [tennis](#), [golf](#) etc.].

### **Canteens/Cafes/Meeting rooms**

- Common staff areas should ensure that social distancing is maintained at 1 person/4sqm\* and 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.
- Cafes/restaurants should open in accordance government guidance/protocols.
- Vending machines could be used with contactless payment, however cleaning will be needed in between each use and users should be provided with disinfectant and hand gel.

### **Sauna**

- The sauna should not be used in any initial opening. If on further government guidance/protocols it is deemed safe to operate, then social distancing should be in place with adequate time given in between for cleaning and ventilation.

### **Steam Room**

- The steam room should not be used in any initial opening. If on further government guidance/protocols it is deemed safe to operate, then social distancing should be in place with adequate time given in between for cleaning and ventilation.

### **Jacuzzi**

- The jacuzzi should not be used in any initial opening. If on further government guidance/protocols it is deemed safe to operate, then social distancing should be in place with adequate time given in between for cleaning and ventilation.

### **Shared amenities- spin dryers, hairdryers etc.**

- Shared amenities should be avoided to ensure adequate hygiene practices are in place.

### **First Aid Responder/Pool Rescues**

- First aid responders should follow guidance/protocols issued by the [HSA](#).
- Water Safety Ireland and the RLSS have issued guidance/protocols regarding safe resuscitation in pool areas. Please liaise for further guidance.

## **5. 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”), Sport Ireland and other government agencies as well as our partners in Swim Ireland.

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 Return to Work Safely Protocol; *COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers* (**and any other further workplace guidance that issues from the HSA/NSAI/HSE**) which is referenced throughout this document. Further information will issue as phased opening progresses.

## **6. DISCLAIMER**

This is a discussion document for the benefit of members. It is designed to guide and encourage dialogue on re-opening leisure centres, sports facilities 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.

### **Ireland Active**

Irish Sport HQ, Sport Ireland Campus,  
Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.

**E:** [info@irelandactive.ie](mailto:info@irelandactive.ie) **P:** 01-6251192

**T:** @irelandactive

**SAMPLE POSTER** for illustration purposes only

**Ireland  
Active**

Leisure, Health  
and Fitness  
Association

# COVID-19/Coronavirus

If we follow these precautions together, everyone can exercise safely and responsibly with us to ensure your safety and the safety of others.



Wash your hands before you enter and when you leave



Bring your own towel & use during exercise



Keep a minimum distance of 2 meters with other gym users



Avoid personal contact with staff and others at all costs



Gym visits are restricted to allocated time slots, please book in advance



Use disinfectant spray provided on equipment before and after use



Toilets should be used one person at a time, ensuring social distancing.



Fill in the self-declaration questionnaire regarding COVID-19



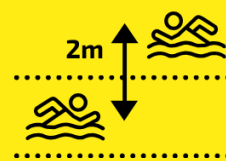
Showers, changing rooms and lockers to be used in limited circumstances



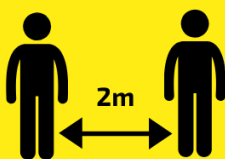
Bring your own water bottle/ sports drink, avoid sharing



Payments can only be made via contactless, direct debit or credit card



Social distancing in all pool areas should be maintained



Maintain social distancing (2 metres) in all areas



Adhere to staff and lead worker representative and outlined COVID-19 measures



Coronavirus  
**COVID-19**  
Public Health  
Advice