



Coronavirus
COVID-19
Public Health
Advice

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

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

Version 2: 15th June 2020

Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
GOVERNMENT’S ROADMAP	3
Phase 1 (May 18)	3
Phase 2 (June 8)	3
Phase 3 (June 29)	3
Phase 4 (July 20)	3
WHAT YOU SHOULD CONSIDER	4
What are the consequences of not implementing these health and safety measures?	4
Return to Work Safety Protocol- COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers	5
Safe use of Face Coverings	5
How to use a cloth face covering properly	5
Taking off a cloth face covering	6
GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR RE-OPENING	7
Pro-Active Steps	7
Staff specific measures	7
User - specific measures	8
Sanitation and Hygiene	8
Suppliers	9
Plant Rooms/ Air-conditioning	9
SPECIFIC FACILITIES	10
Gym/Studio Areas	10
Personal Training/Outdoor Fitness instruction	10
Swimming Pool Area	11
Showers, Lockers, Changing Rooms and Toilets	11
Waterparks/Outdoor water activities	11
Summer Camps	12
Sports Halls/Pitches/Outdoor spaces	12
Canteens/Cafes/Meeting rooms	12
Sauna	12
Steam Room	12
Jacuzzi	12
Shared amenities- spin dryers, hairdryers etc.	12
First Aid Responder/Pool Rescues	13
CONTINUING AND EVOLVING FRAMEWORK	13
DISCLAIMER	13
APPENDICES	13

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 (**Version 2**- which supercedes previous versions). It is not intended to be exhaustive advice or legal advice. It should be read in conjunction with all updated government advice and guidelines.

GOVERNMENT'S ROADMAP

The government published a [five-phase roadmap](#) to easing Ireland's COVID-19 restrictions. This roadmap was revised on 5th June to four phases ending on 20th July 2020. **Ireland Active is seeking further clarification regarding the detail of phase 3 & 4**, 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.

The 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 or within your county
- 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 (15 people maximum)

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- **clarification being sought on permitted activities**
- Open cafés and restaurants providing on-premises food and drink where they can comply with social distancing measures and strict cleaning in operation
- 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
- Travel outside of your region permitted

Phase 4 (July 20)

- Open public swimming pools where effective cleaning can be carried out and social distancing can be maintained
- 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.

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 8th 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

Safe use of Face Coverings

The [government published guidance](#) on the safe use of face coverings on the 15th May (updated 8th June) which includes the below guidance-

How to use a cloth face covering properly

Do:

- clean your hands properly before you put it on
- practise using it so you are comfortable putting it on and taking it off
- make sure it is made from a fabric you are comfortable wearing
- cover your mouth and nose with it and make sure there are no gaps between your cloth face covering
- tie it securely
- carry unused masks in a sealable clean waterproof bag(for example, a ziplock bag)
- carry a second similar type bag to put used masks in

Don't:

- touch a mask or face covering while wearing it - if you do, clean your hands properly

- use a damp or wet medical mask or reuse a medical mask
- share masks
- do not lower your mask to speak, eat and smoke or vape - if you need to uncover your nose or mouth take the mask off and put it in the bag for used masks
- do not discard masks in public places

Taking off a cloth face covering

To take it off properly:

- remove it from behind - do not touch the front of the mask
- do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth
- clean your hands properly
- put disposable masks in a bin straight away

Framework Version 2

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.
- The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) have published a number of COVID-19 [templates and checklists](#) for organisations re-opening businesses which should be utilised
- *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;
- Users that have had COVID-19 in the past and recovered should seek medical advice before undertaking high intensity exercise
- 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 fountains should not be used.

- [Legionella testing](#) should be undertaken before re-opening. The [HSE have published a guidance note](#) on managing recreational water facilities during and after prolonged shutdown.
- Face coverings may be worn indoors in accordance with government guidance for indoor areas where social distancing cannot be maintained.

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
- Exercisers/participants should not congregate before or after classes/activities
- 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 employed in order to enable safe management and recording of users in the facility.
- Where spotting of weights is being undertaken, face coverings should be worn

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.
- Exercise in Phase 2 should be undertaken in line with the [Ireland Active guidance note for Phase 2](#) and government guidance.

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 5th guidance note by the [HSE/HPSC](#).
- Social distancing (2m) in pool areas should be maintained in addition to reduced capacity, with a maximum of 1 person for every 6sqm* bather load on initial opening (i.e. a 50% reduction of the Swimming Pool Safety Guidelines/PWTAG maximum bathing load). ***Note this figure could change based on government guidance.** Changing room restrictions will also likely determine reduced capacities.
- 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 ([see interim HPSC guidance 12th June](#)), and [Swim Ireland guidance on swimming lessons](#).
- 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 follow government guidance which may require remaining closed initially and/or limited use, social distancing, hygiene measures ventilation and regular cleaning when allowed re-open.
- Swim Ireland have published a number of protocols for swimming activities (club, operations, lessons etc.) which Ireland Active have supported in developing and which are [available here](#).

Showers, Lockers, Changing Rooms and Toilets

- Gym exercisers should come dressed and use showers at home in the initial opening where possible to reduce the use of changing rooms. Beach style changing for swimmers may also be possible to reduce use of changing rooms.
- Lockers may be used to store bags but should be cleaned in between use. Spacing in between lockers or alternate use should be in place to ensure social distancing.
- Showers, changing rooms and lockers should only be used in limited circumstances initially.
- One person per group shower area or the use of individual cubicles can help ensure 2m social distancing.
- Toilets should be used with limited capacity, ensuring social distancing.
- Shared facilities such as spin dryers and hairdryers should not be used.
- Social distancing should be adhered to in changing areas.

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.
- Seating on poolside indoors/outdoors should be removed where possible, and where required should be spaced at least 2m apart and should be booked in advance and regularly cleaned.

Summer Camps

- Summer camps should be conducted in accordance with government guidance regarding numbers allowed for indoor/outdoor children's activities. Interim guidance from the HPSC (12th June 2020) can be [viewed here](#).

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 regular cleaning will be needed in between and users should be provided with disinfectant and hand gel.

Sauna

- Saunas are recommended to follow government guidance which may require remaining closed initially and/or limited use, social distancing, hygiene measures, ventilation and regular cleaning when allowed re-open.
- Further government guidance may issue before opening is permitted which should be followed.

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

- Jacuzzis are recommended to follow government guidance which may require remaining closed initially and/or limited use, social distancing, hygiene measures, ventilation and regular cleaning when allowed re-open.
- Further government guidance may issue before opening is permitted which should be followed.

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 lifeguarding/first aid in pool areas. Please liaise with them for further guidance.

CONTINUING AND EVOLVING FRAMEWORK

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

The Health Service Executive (“HSE”), National Standards of Authority Ireland (“NSAI”), Health and Safety Authority (“HSA”), 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.

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 **P:** 01-6251192

T: @irelandactive

APPENDICES

- See Ireland Active [members area](#) for templates