



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Enquiries: Prof S Abdool Karim  
E-mail: salim.abdoolkarim@caprisa.org

**INTERNAL MEMO**

Date:	23 July 2020		
To:	<b>Minister ZL Mkhize, Honorable Minister of Health</b>	From:	<b>Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19</b>

**Problem Statement**

1. Given the current Covid-19 situation & the financial challenges facing this sector, should gyms & fitness centres be allowed to open?
2. If so, what risk mitigation measures should be instituted, noting that WHO does not recommend masks during vigorous exercise?

**Review**

Should gyms and fitness centres be allowed to open?

- The South African Fitness Industry has developed a COVID-19 plan (see attachment).
- Additionally the University of Cape Town Research Centre for Health (HPALS) has produced a report to evaluate the fitness industry’s response (See report).
- The Fitness Industry’s plan focusses on both staff and gym/facility users.

Comment on fitness industry documents:

*Also see fitness industry document with general comments embedded.*

Symptom/Screening/Contact Tracing

- The proposal to call the NICD for each symptomatic case should be removed.
- Cases should be managed according to existing protocols, i.e. send home to self-isolate and access testing as indicated by guidance at the time.
- Propose add that cases can be evaluated by a healthcare provider if needed.
- For confirmed cases – notification must be made by the attending clinician or laboratory doing the test and not the health club

Social distancing

- If feasible, consideration should be given to having maximum class numbers (perhaps 10)
- 2m may not be sufficient for high intensity exercises. Masks will become saturated quickly and sweat droplets can spray further than 2 m.
- Equipment needs to be separated by 2m, which should be measured from outer edge of equipment, not centre.

## PPE

- Agree masks should be worn at all time. No strong evidence for dangers of using masks during exercise. Since activity is in a closed space, it is safer for masks to be worn, with removal only when the exercise is vigorous.
- Use of FFP2 masks for staff is not consistent with other guidance.

## Staff who test Positive for Covid-19

- Self-isolation indicated for 14 days. This should be amended to 10 days as per updated recommendations or stipulate that the duration as being according to the prevailing guidance (so that the duration will not need to be updated when the quarantine period changes again).

## High-risk and confirmed exposure by asymptomatic

- Currently indicated at 8 days. Propose align with duration of quarantine guidelines.

## General

- The term 'sick leave' should be clarified, and replaced with quarantine or isolation with referral to these guidelines.

## What risk mitigation measures should be instituted?

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that mask should not be worn when exercising as they may reduce the ability to breathe comfortably.
- The evidence around this recommendation is however not strong.
- Due to the closed space and closed and confined space, masks should be used in gyms and health facilities as recommended by the fitness industry.

## Recommendations

- The MAC on Covid-19 agrees that gyms and fitness facilities can be opened with the mitigation measures and consideration of the MAC comments.
- Gyms and fitness facilities can reopen in such a way as to minimize COVID-19 transmission.
- Risk mitigation measures need to be in place as outlined by the Fitness Industry and HPALS.
- MAC on Covid-19 agrees that masks should be worn at all time. There is not yet strong evidence to support the not using a mask during exercise. Since activity is in a closed space, it is safer for masks to be worn.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



**PROFESSOR SALIM S. ABDOOL KARIM**

**OVERARCHING CHAIRPERSON: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19**

**DATE: 23 July 2020**

## CC:

- » Dr S Buthelezi (Director-General: Health)
- » Dr T Pillay (Deputy Director-General: National Health Insurance)
- » Dr S Zungu (Project Lead: Sectoral Response to Covid-19)
- » Incident Management Team