



APSE Briefing: COVID-19: Re-opening of Pools, Gyms and Leisure Centres - challenges

All: Contacts in England

For info only: Northern Ireland, Scotland & Wales

Key Points

- Guidance suggests a loading maximum of 9.3 m² per person in gyms and 3 m² for pools
- Ventilation requirements are 100% fresh air with no recirculation at 20 l/s/person – this may be a challenge for most air-conditioning systems
- Changing facilities are discouraged and suggests users come pre-dressed and showered, a likely disincentive, especially for swimming, if returning home damp
- Saunas and steam rooms should remain closed

1. Introduction

The Government has finally given the go ahead for the re-opening of pools, gyms and leisure centres in England. In Northern Ireland gyms can open from 10 July. Announcements for Wales and Scotland are likely imminent. This briefing highlights those areas of guidance which are likely to be problematic and those unanticipated.

2. Context

The Government has finally announced the timetable for the re-opening of pools, gyms and leisure centres in England.

From 11 July:

- organised team sports outdoors - subject to the relevant sport's guidance being published
- outdoor waterparks and swimming pools
- outdoor hot tubs
- outdoor hydrotherapy pools
- outdoor whirlpools
- outdoor jacuzzis
- outdoor sport and physical activity participation events

From 25 July:

- indoor gyms
- fitness and dance studios
- indoors sports venues and facilities
- indoor swimming pools
- indoor hot tubs
- indoor hydrotherapy pools
- indoor whirlpools
- indoor jacuzzis

Remain Closed:

- Saunas and steam rooms should stay out of use for the time being as the risk of transmission is unclear.

3. Guidance

The Government has provided [guidance](#) for providers of grassroots sport and gym / leisure facilities. Several sports and leisure organisations including UKActive and Swim England had written guidance anticipating the move, much of which is standard across most services in regard to social distancing and ensuring regular cleansing especially around touch points.

APSE has been working on remobilisation plans for many council service areas, including leisure. What is apparent is that in-house leisure teams are resilient enough to bring facilities back on line relatively quickly (couple of weeks). Whether they choose to do so may depend on likely attendances and at what point makes most financial sense to bring staff back from furlough. **However, the guidelines impose other restrictions which require immediate attention.**

3.1 Air extraction and ventilation measures

The guidance states:

Ventilation is an important part of mitigating against the transmission of COVID-19. Ventilation into the building should be optimised to ensure a fresh air supply is provided to all areas of the facility and increased wherever possible. Particular attention should be given to areas where high intensity exercise activity takes place.

To achieve this, specific measures should be implemented:

- **The maximum occupancy of each gym should be limited by providing a minimum of 100sqft (9.29 square metres) per person.** For this figure, the area is the net useable gym space available to members to use, including changing rooms, toilet and wash facilities. Reducing capacity in this way whilst sustaining ventilation flows, will increase the typical current 10l/s/p flow rate of ventilation to at least 20l/s/p, as fewer people are being served by the ventilation system.
- **Ventilation systems should provide 100% fresh air and not recirculate air from one space to another.**

You should also consider:

- increasing the existing ventilation rate by fully opening dampers and running fans on full speed
- **Operating the ventilation system 24 hours a day**
- Increase the frequency of filter changes
- In the absence of known ventilation rates, a carbon dioxide sensor shall be used as a surrogate indicator to switch on additional mechanical ventilation or open windows.

Further guidance is provided in the CIBSE [COVID-19 Ventilation guidance](#).

The challenge

Achieving this standard may cause a problem. At the required volumes, existing air-conditioning systems may struggle to cool 100% fresh air to the recommended 16-18°C ideal gym temperature suggested by Sport England when external temperatures are more than 5°C above this and conversely heating systems may struggle should the temperature fall 5°C below. 24 hour a day running will be significantly more energy intensive than currently.

In a pool setting, the air temperature is ideally 1°C above the pool temperature and humidity controlled. A typical recirculation value might be 20% fresh air. Unless the outside temperature is close to that required inside, systems may not have the necessary capacity

3.3 Pool Loading

The guidance suggests a loading of 3m² per bather. This is double that was envisaged by Swim England. For a 25m x 10m pool that would be over 80 swimmers, more than the average attendance prior to lockdown.

All venues should encourage attendees to arrive at the facility in sports kit and where possible to travel home to change / shower. Use of changing rooms and showering facilities should in general be avoided where possible, although these must be available for participants with disabilities or special needs and are likely to be needed after swimming.

4. APSE Support

APSE will be working with our member local councils for sensible solutions to some of the issues raised within the guidance. In effect this matter raises so many questions as to the viability of the guidance in re-opening gyms and pools that it is questionable as to whether re-opening would be realistically achievable. We would welcome your own comments and views on the matters raised so that we can raise these issues through Government channels. Please email your comments to Rob Bailey on rbailey@apse.org.uk

APSE Solutions, the consultancy arm of APSE, can assist local authorities with all aspects of leisure service delivery. From contract review through to service planning and development, Solutions has access to a wide range of expert support. This can include legal advice where appropriate, as well as consultancy and interim management.

The Solutions team also has business planning and commercial knowledge and can help with longer term organisational and business planning. For a no obligation discussion and help to establish

what you might require contact the Head of APSE Solutions, Andy Mudd. Email amudd@apse.org.uk.

Rob Bailey

APSE Principal Advisor

Email: rbailey@apse.org.uk