COVID 19
Indoor Climbing Gym Industry Guidelines for British Columbia

Introduction:

The following document outlines the recommendations endorsed by the Association of BC Climbing Gym Owners with respect to the reopening of Indoor Climbing Gyms in the context of COVID 19. They are consistent with guidance provided by the Climbing Wall Association and Climbing Escalade Canada. Furthermore, these recommendations are based on current scientific knowledge, which is constantly evolving, and at the time of writing, all recommendations align and adhere to the rules and regulations put in place by multiple levels of government and local health authorities.   As such, this document is subject to change, and is superseded by local regulations.

Goal of this document:

The purpose of this document is to assist indoor climbing gym operators in following the directives of BC Public Health by offering climbing-specific interpretation of those directives so that indoor climbing gyms can comply with WorksafeBC compatible safe operating procedures that preserve the health and wellbeing of our staff, clients and the citizens of British Columbia.

Risk Management & The Culture of Climbing:

Risk management is a top priority in the business of indoor climbing. While the risks of COVID 19 are fundamentally different from the inherent risks of climbing, the evaluation of risk, using techniques to mitigate risk, and making judgements about accepting various levels of risk are integral to climbing. Climbing gyms already educate their clients about the risks of participation; it will be a familiar process to further educate visitors on the new and unique risks posed by COVID 19, as well as the recommended measures which can mitigate those risks.

We must ask ourselves, what aspects of indoor climbing pose the highest risk of spreading COVID 19?

The following components have been identified as most likely:

- Physical contact between individuals, groups of climbers, and staff members
- Indirect transfer of the virus from high-touch surfaces; both within the climbing space and in general common areas
- Direct droplet transmission during activity due to close proximity
- Large groups of people gathering together
- Delivering Hands-On Emergency First Aid

The Activity of Climbing:

Climbing necessarily involves the touching of climbing holds within the climbing space. Current science suggests that transmission through shared surface contact can only occur if one then transfers residual particles into one's system, usually by touching their face, allowing the virus to enter via their mouth, nose, or eyes.

Current preventative measures recommended by the government and health authorities such as frequent hand washing, covering your cough, and maintaining physical distance should be reasonably adequate to reduce the risks of infection within the climbing space.

Guide to Use:

These guidelines require adaptation by individual operators for their particular facility, location and client group. Recommendations are not meant to be complete and the authors expect the industry to find many solutions not listed in these guidelines. This document on its own is not a complete plan and must be accompanied by a site specific document that outlines how a facility will meet the local requirements.

Disclaimer:

These guidelines have been created by consensus amongst British Columbia's Indoor Climbing Gym operators, and is based on the best information currently available. The authors remind readers that it is mandatory to follow all Municipal, Provincial and Federal regulations and requirements, from which these guidelines are derived and which we aim to support and interpret.

BC Climbing Gym Industry Guidelines

To reduce the risks associated with the potential sources of transmission noted above, and to reopen alongside other recreational activities in mid-May, the industry organizations of CEC and the CWA recommend several strategies to achieve the Public Health goals as identified by the Provincial Government of British Columbia.

The strategies outlined below are aimed at addressing the following components of the [BC Restart Plan](#) and [Go Forward Checklist](#): *Personal Self Care in Organizations, Physical Distancing, Managing Social Interaction in Organizations, and Implementing Safe Organizational Practices.*

A brief description of each of these categories and strategies is included below, while specific *Engineering and Administrative Controls* are broken down at the end of this document in *Appendix A*.

(1) Personal Self Care in Organizations:
Any successful strategy must begin with Personal Self Care within organizational settings. From the standpoint of returning to operations, this has particular relevance to staff members and their ability to practice self care while at work. In order for these measures to be effective, this general principle applies equally to both employees and visitors to climbing facilities. We are now very familiar with these practices:

- Do not shake hands, high five, or hug others
- Cover your cough / sneeze with your elbow / sleeve
- Wash and sanitize your hands frequently and thoroughly
- Stay home if you are sick or symptomatic
- Maintain reasonable physical distance at all times

Personal self care is further detailed below in the recommendations **(3a)** for a Staff Health and Safety Strategy.

(2) Physical Distancing within Climbing Facilities:

To achieve the goal of maintaining appropriate physical distance between individuals at climbing facilities, it is recommended that gyms implement both a Physical Distancing Strategy and a Capacity Management Strategy. These two strategies overlap to a large degree, and further contain aspects that address various dimensions of both **(3)** Social Interaction & **(4)** Safe Organizational Practices.

(2a) Physical Distancing Strategy:

Implement a set of administrative or engineering controls to maintain <u>sensible</u> and <u>reasonable</u> distance between participants (3-6 ft; 1-2 m):
- In particular this may relate to:
    - Climbing spaces (bouldering areas, roped climbs, auto-belays)
    - Rest and recovery areas
    - Reception and observation areas
    - Training or Fitness areas
    - Locker rooms and washroom facilities
    - Entry and Exit points

(2b) Capacity Management Strategy:

To ensure the above Physical Distancing Strategy can be followed, a Capacity Management Strategy may be required:
- This may mean reducing the operating capacity of some facilities, and likely includes:
    - A visual floor plan showing revised capacity (if necessary)
    - A strategy for monitoring current capacity
    - Methods for managing high traffic areas
    - Considerations for different user groups (eg: youth programs, adult courses, and camps)
    - Demonstration that all Provincial Requirements are met

(3) Managing Social Interaction in Organizations

Managing social interactions in Climbing Facilities may require some modifications to both the way in which people access the facility and the way they participate in the activity of climbing. There are multiple facets that are critical to this management including: **(3a)** staff interactions, **(3b)** customer interactions, and engagement with the facility through **(4)** Safe Organizational Practices.

(3a) Staff Health and Safety Strategy:

In order to ensure Personal Self Care for staff, facilities should equip staff with adequate protective measures, training, and operational support. Operators have a higher obligation to their staff than to clients and must meet WorksafeBC requirements for consultation and training. Staff interactions should also be managed so as to keep both employees and the public safe.

- WorksafeBC requires:
    - Training on new COVID 19 related procedures
    - Consultation on new procedures with the Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committee (for gyms with 20 or more employees) or with a Worker Health and Safety Representative (for gyms with 9-19 employees)
    - Consultation is *specifically required* for the selection of PPE and Respiratory equipment
    - Adequate training in appropriate use of PPE for all staff.
    - Clarity on Sick Leave policy
    - Facility plans for COVID19 procedures must be posted.
    - Adapting First Aid response to be consistent with WorksafeBC Documents listed in Appendix B

- This may also include:
    - Measures to eliminate physical interaction between staff and customers; eg: Plexiglass barriers at POS
    - Modifications to operational procedures (such as transactions or rentals) where indirect contact cannot be completely avoided
    - Increased availability of hand washing opportunities
    - Frequent cleaning of staff areas and common use items
    - Ongoing monitoring of staff for signs and symptoms of illness

Some aspects of customer interactions are facilitated by the measures already outlined, and can be further enhanced by **(3b)** implementing a Facility Maintenance & Hygiene Strategy.

(3b) Facility Maintenance & Hygiene Strategy:
To support Personal Self Care and to manage Social Interactions, it is likely that facilities will need to implement increased maintenance and hygiene measures, on top of previous duties already undertaken.
- This may include:
  - Increased frequency of sanitizing high traffic and high touch surfaces such as door knobs, washroom fixtures, pay terminals and countertops
  - Adequate staffing, training, and supplies to enact this strategy
  - System for ensuring and recording that these tasks are completed
  - Effective strategy for washing climbing holds prior to route-setting and protecting the health of staff when washing holds

(4) Implement Safe Organizational Practices
To further support Personal Self Care and to help manage Social Interactions, it is likely that facilities will need to implement new Safe Organizational Practices, many of which have been outlined in the strategies above. Additional measures can be found in the following **(4a)** Preventative Risk Management Strategy, which aligns with the other strategies, and should be aimed at educating and training the public and staff on new measures, expectations, and enforcement.

(4a) Preventative Risk Management Strategy
Prevention is critical to reducing the likelihood of transmitting COVID 19 in climbing facilities, and a strategy that focuses on prevention, using multiple modes and methods, is arguably the best approach to managing this risk.

- This may include:
  - A clearly explained policy on the obligations of climbers in achieving public health goals
  - Clear signage on the risks of infection, behavioural expectations, and preventative measures such as: handwashing, physical distancing, and covering your cough
  - Access to adequate hand washing stations and hand sanitizer, prior to, during, and following climbing sessions

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- ○ Clearly communicated 'Sick Policy' for Participants, Spectators and Supervisors
- ○ Additional training for staff and participants in regards to hygiene
- ○ Ongoing communication to members, staff and the public about the actions taken by our industry to do our part in responding to COVID-19

(5) Planned Response to an Outbreak

The Association of BC Climbing Gym Owners further feels that gyms should also have a proactive plan in place on how to respond to an outbreak, and suggests a Contact Tracing & Outbreak Strategy. In many ways most climbing gyms have an advantage over retail stores as a log of all visitors and their contact info is typically kept on file through the facility CMS. It will be relatively easy to assist Health Authorities as they seek to identify who was present at a facility should a COVID case be identified.

(5a) Contact Tracing & Outbreak Strategy
- ● Local authorities may require that:
    - ○ Gyms have a strategy in place to assist Health Authorities with rapid and thorough contact tracing should a case or outbreak of COVID 19 occur
    - ○ Businesses agree to swiftly contact and cooperate with local Health Authorities in the event of an outbreak
    - ○ Gyms have a post-outbreak cleaning plan prior to returning operations
    - ○ Gyms designate a point of contact for interacting with Health Authorities

Conclusion:

By adopting the above strategies, tailoring the specifics to meet the unique needs of each facility, and by ensuring that no practice, measure, or activity contravenes any relevant local health regulations, it is felt that Indoor Climbing Gyms can return to offering the recreational services that contribute immensely to the health and wellbeing of our community. More detailed examples on how to implement these strategies is contained below in *Appendix A*.

Appendix A:
Indoor Climbing Gym Operators Tool-Kit
Suggestions and Examples

Introduction:
The following appendix aims to act as a tool-kit for helping to understand the range of appropriate ways climbing gyms are currently considering to achieve the goals and implement the strategies mentioned above. This incomplete list of suggestions and examples may not work in specific cases, and each gym is different in their needs and requirements. It is important to recognize that what is functionally and practically viable in one location may not be necessary or feasible in another.

Methodology:
These examples have been gathered by survey from the membership of the Association of BC Climbing Gym Owners and have been curated by the COVID 19 task force.. They reflect the general consensus around ideas and suggestions on how best to:
1) reduce the risks of transmission
2) follow the recommendations as outlined by health officials
3) return to 'regular business operations' in regards to indoor climbing.
 A full list of survey responses can be obtained upon request.

The Tool-Kit:
The Indoor Gym Operators Tool-kit is broken out in categories by strategy, with specific reference to Engineering Controls (physical alterations to the facility), and Administrative Controls (modifications to functional aspects of operations).

Guide to Use:
Operators are encouraged to select from this appendix, adapt for local use, and develop their own approaches and solutions. We hope this is a useful tool. To contribute further ideas to this document for later versions, please contact the ABCCG

Physical Distancing Strategies:

Engineering Controls:
- place markers, line-up areas, check-in & waiver stations
- facility map, showing max capacity and identifying choke points (see Appendix B for an example)
- clearly denoted common use zones, including: purpose, capacity and boundary markers
  - rest and recovery areas
  - belonging storage and staging area
  - warm up and cool down area
  - staircase management
- modified route setting and climbing space
  - by zones (no overlap)
  - density adjustments (more or less as appropriate)
  - limited climbing lanes (reduction of anchors, removal of ropes)
- remove, relocate, or respace gathering areas
  - remove common area benches and tables
  - select alternating cubbies for use
  - redistribute chairs for spacing and seating
  - create additional temporary change stalls
- install temporary hand wash stations to avoid crowding in washrooms

Administrative Controls:
- supervision and enforcement ideas; modified staff duties and tasks
  - entry and exit procedures
  - small group and zone management techniques
  - double arm's length or other 'rule of thumb' distance policies
  - facility walkthroughs & floor supervision
- customer flow adjustments: check-in, washrooms, high traffic zones
- rental options:
  - self pick-up & drop-off, limited rentals, long term rentals
  - enhanced cleaning protocols, inactive period, added inventory
- customer expectation adjustments:
  - come dressed to climb
  - leave valuables at home
  - limited socializing
  - climb in small groups of friends; do not move between groups

Capacity Management Strategy:

After evaluating gym capacity and layout, and in consultation with local authorities, gyms may apply some of the following strategies to limit capacity. Some facilities may be able to meet capacity limits without changes to operation

Engineering Controls:
- capacity map with physical demarcations
- door counter and traffic monitors
- modified check-in process and reception area
- clear designation of unique area capacities
- closure or restrictions of certain areas
- removal/reduction of equipment
- signage

Administrative Controls:
- limited time frames & suggested visit length
- user group based timeslots & opportunities
- reservation or booking system
- modified (increased) hours of operation
- limit spectators and non-participants
- limit program offerings (groups, lessons, private bookings)
- breaks between groups
- require check-out upon exit

Staff Health and Safety Strategy:

Engineering Controls:
- Adequate PPE for all Staff
- Plexiglass shields at POS
- Dedicated staff washroom facilities
- Additional workstations
- Barriers in offices
- Rental return and pick-up areas

Administrative Controls:
- Appropriate training on PPE, handwashing, sanitizing and other gym specific tasks
- Cashless operations
- Modified orientations, tests and tours
- Staff groups / pods
- Dedicated workstations & POS terminals
- Dedicated roles
- Ample opportunities to wash hands
- Additional staffing to meet requirements
- Modification to rental program
- Clear Staff Sickness and Sick Leave Policy
- Appropriate use of masks

Facility Maintenance and Hygiene Strategy:

An increase in hygiene is a necessary part of a COVID19 response. Operators may want to consider the value of demonstrating these typically behind the scenes actions to clients in order to give client confidence in their return to climbing.

Engineering Controls:
- eliminating high-risk aspects: showers, water fountains, laundry
- prop open access doors
- added signage on personal self care and hygiene expectations
- additional sanitation stations throughout space
- liquid chalk dispensers

Administrative Controls:
- clients and staff must wash and sanitize hands upon:
  - entering facility
  - prior to climbing
  - prior to donning or removing masks
  - after climbing
  - prior to leaving
- limit access to change rooms
- limit access to training or fitness/yoga studios
- revised and enhanced cleaning schedule
- unique processes: route setting, forerunning, and hold washing
- limit sale and/or consumption of food and drink
- additional requirements of PPE for hold-washing
- use of high percentage alcohol based liquid chalk only

Preventative Risk Management Strategy:

In addition to managing current risk inside the facility, operators are encouraged to develop procedures that diminish the likelihood of future risk of COVID spread.

Engineering Controls:
- prominent signage throughout the facility for everyone
    - no access if symptomatic
    - proper hygiene
    - capacity details
    - increased measures
- cough shields at POS

Administrative Controls:
- additional training for staff
    - refusal of service
    - screening measures
    - refund policy
- clear communication to community; education via:
    - website, social media, verbal, in house media
    - member email, newsletter, welcome packages
- additional team meetings and staff updates
- inclusion of COVID 19 risks in Waiver and in welcome materials
- clear Sickness and Symptom Policy (staff and clients)
    - staff screening and attestation
    - record keeping and ongoing status check-ins
    - coverage policy and additional staff on-call

Contact Tracing & Outbreak Strategy:

Climbing gyms have always been good community partners. In order to do our part for the wider community, facilities can prepare their resources to be ready to assist public health needs and respond to changing public health demands. A strategy to respond to a facility outbreak is recommended.

Engineering Controls:
- Customer Management System
  - Facility usage list
  - Time-in / Time-out
- Adequate cleaning supplies
- Critical contact list: phone numbers for BCCDC, Health authorities, etc...

Administrative Controls:
- Cleaning/disinfecting protocol
- Contact tracing action plan:
  - Government officials
  - Staff on shift
  - Members in Facility
  - Non-members in Facility
- Follow-up steps
- Re-opening plan
- Monitoring of Public Health instructions for business

Appendix B:
Resources and Information:

Introduction:
The following appendix aims to share practices across our industry, and help operators complete a pre-opening check that should catch the most significant components of a successful return to play during the COVID 19 pandemic. Information from international organizations as well as other useful resources will be identified and collected so as to help inform the industry and educate the climbing community.

Resources and Supporting Documents:

Climbing Escalade Canada Pandemic Task Force Web Page

CEC COVID Guidance Document (PDF)

CEC Fillable Worksheet (.docx)

Climbing Wall Association Reopening Guidance (Webpage)

BC Government - Go Forward Checklist (Webpage)
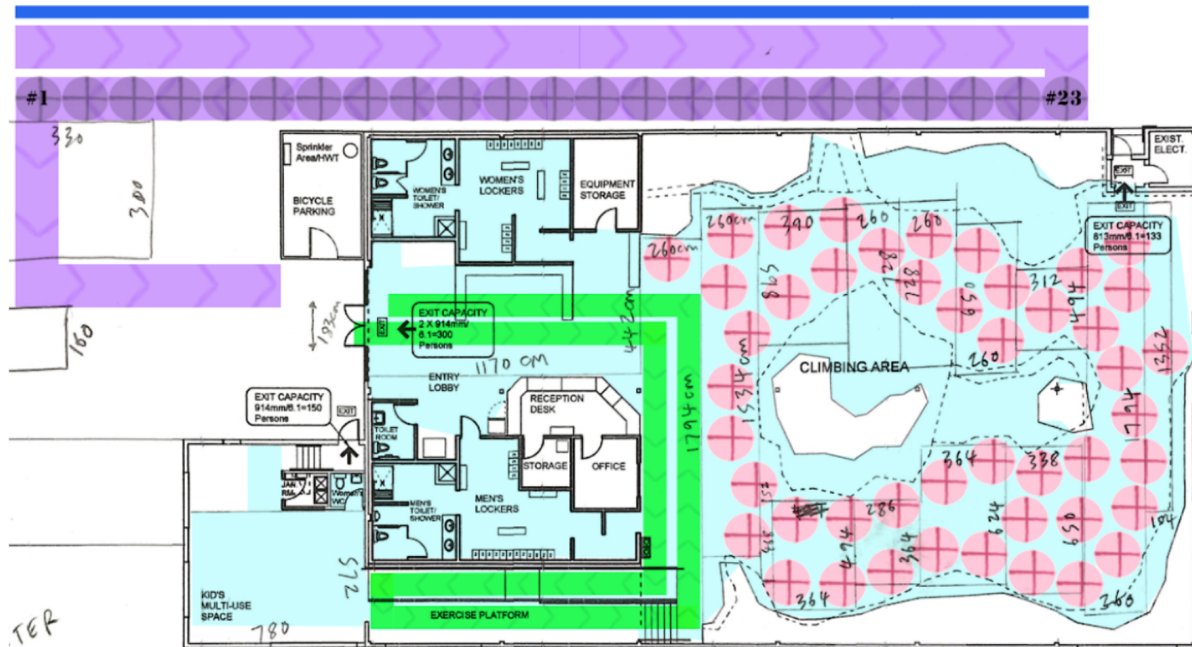
WorkSafeBC - Returning to Safe Operation - Phase 2 (Webpage)

WorkSafeBC - Covid19 Safety Plan (Webpage)

WorksafeBC - OFA Protocols during COVID19 (Webpage)

First Aid to an Unresponsive Person During COVID19 - Red Cross (Webpage)

Health Orders, Notices and Guidance from the Provincial Health Officer (Webpage)

Sample Capacity Map

Above is a floor plan of **Hive Vancouver**

KEY:

Purple	Queue, 1 meter radius per person, to be marked on the floor (46+ climbers)
Dark blue	Road safety barriers in place to extend queue area onto the road
Pink	Person with 1 meter radius (46 climbers)
Green	In/out flow, to be marked on the floor (1m wide each way, 0.5m radius pp)
Light blue	Floor space accessible by climbers, not including upper fitness/top-out areas

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