

Dear Member of Parliament,

I am writing to you to draw your attention to the adverse effects of forcing our gyms to close during the 4 week lockdown:

We are told we should exercise regularly, according to NHS guidelines Adults should:

- aim to be physically active every day. Any activity is better than none, and more is better still
- do strengthening activities that work all the major muscles (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms) on at least 2 days a week
- do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week
- reduce time spent sitting or lying down and break up long periods of not moving with some activity.

Source: NHS exercise guidelines 2019

Government guidance tell us that regular exercise has the following benefits:

- Improves health
- Improves sleep
- Maintains healthy weight
- Manages stress
- Improves quality of life

And that is also reduces your chances of:

- Type 2 diabetes by 40%
- Cardiovascular / heart disease by 35%
- Falls by 30%
- Depression by 30%
- Joint and back pain by 25%
- Breast and colon cancers by 20%

Source: UK chief medical officers physical activity guidelines 2019

In addition other studies have shown a whole range of health benefits from regular exercise including but not limited to reduction in blood pressure, reduced risk of strokes, reduced risk of arthritis, improved lung function, lower risks of dementia, optimising hormonal levels and improving our immune system.

As well as improving our physical health exercise is also vital to people's mental health especially at a time that it is being so negatively affected. It is empowering, it gives people routine, offers a distraction, self efficacy (a sense of something they can control), reduces stress, reduces anxiety, helps with sleep and improves overall mood. Exercise is one of the most powerful tools we have in combating mental health issues. Academic studies show that

poor mental health has a direct negative impact on physical health resulting in higher death rates & a lowered immune system response. The restrictions are obviously having a massive impact on people's mental health with 1 in 10 young people having mental health issues [1] and an increase in attempted suicides [2] improving mental health is of utmost importance at this time.

Whilst the government has encouraged outdoor exercise unfortunately it is not as simple as saying just "go for a jog". Indoor gyms are vital in a country with our climate especially at this time of year with short days, poor weather & low temperatures. Towards the winter people's motivation to exercise will naturally decrease so we need to remove barriers to exercise to enable people to train as easily & comfortably as possible. Whilst some people may be happy to go for a jog outside, firstly this does not meet the NHS guidelines on exercise detailed above, weather may not permit this, it may not be/feel safe to do so & not everybody can go for a run due to personal limiting factors such as pregnancy, injury, mobility issues or disabilities for example some people may not be able to run outdoors but may be able to use a rowing machine, hand bikes or resistance equipment.

Gyms and leisure facilities have continued to follow strict government guidance to ensure social distancing and comprehensive cleanliness protocols as demonstrated by the low transmission rates. Only 0.99 cases of Covid-19 have been recorded per 100,000 visits.[3] This is a very low number and surely more than offset by the physical and mental health benefits.

It has been shown that optimal physical health is vital in the fight against coronavirus. Figures covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland from the Intensive Care National Audit Research Centre suggest that at least two thirds of people who have fallen seriously ill with coronavirus were overweight or obese [4]. NHS England data shows that diabetes was the most common condition among people who died in-hospital with Covid-19 (27% of deaths). NHS England data also shows that 12% of people who died in-hospital with Covid-19 had ischaemic heart disease [5] and that 19% of people who died in-hospital with Covid-19 had dementia—the second largest pre-existing condition following diabetes [6]. Regular exercise reduces the risk of developing everyone of these conditions and therefore reduces the risk of dying of covid-19.

If the goal of the lockdown is saving lives and reducing hospital admissions then by closing gyms during the lockdown you may inadvertently be making the situation much much worse. I ask you to classify gyms as essential and allow them to remain open throughout this lockdown.

[1] <https://priorygroup.com/blog/mental-health-and-young-people>

[2] London ambulance crews report attending on average 37 suicide attempts per day in 2020, compared to 22 in 2019.

[3]

<https://www.ukactive.com/news/fitness-and-leisure-sector-continues-close-monitoring-of-covid-19-rates-in-uk-gyms-and-leisure-facilities/>

[4], [5], [6]

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health/what-makes-you-at-risk-from-coronavirus#Heading4>