ABC GUIDELINES: COVID-19
Guidelines for the reopening of Climbing Gym Industry during social distancing

Written in partnership with UK Active and the OIA and compliant with the Government:
OVERVIEW

This document is a framework setting out the operational requirements for opening climbing gyms and is based on a joint framework developed with UK Active for gyms and leisure centres during an anticipated period of “social distancing”, following the full closure of the sector due to Covid-19.

The document has been developed in full partnership with the major fitness and leisure operators in the UK and has been reviewed by a leading virologist. It has also been informed by best practice from international markets where governments are at different stages of managing the Covid-19 crisis, and working with their own fitness sectors.

The guidelines have been written following research through working groups from the Association of British Climbing Walls. The ABC have also been in weekly contact with a number of other European and North American indoor climbing organisations. The ABC guidelines are comparable or stricter than those from other countries we have been working with.

The guidelines have been approved by The British Mountaineering Council, the sport’s National Governing Body.

Our guidelines are compliant with those produced by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which have been written in consultation with UKActive, Sport England, Sport and Recreation Alliance, National Governing Bodies, Public Health England and the HSE.

We believe climbing will play a vital role in ensuring the return of physical activity and the ongoing health and well-being of the nation following the raising of Covid-19 restrictions. We all understand how important any physical activity is, and as the Chief Medical Officer stated ‘There is no situation, no age, no condition, where exercise is not a good thing’.

This document sets out the framework for opening climbing gyms and provides a basis for individual operators to add their own operating guidance for customers, staff and supply chains in their own venues as necessary.

It is not intended to be exhaustive in covering every possible scenario but aims to provide a clear direction for the entire leisure sector, ensuring climbing gyms will fall within the best practice of the leading recognised leisure facilities.

Individual climbing gyms may make their own decisions to enhance or adapt this to their own venues, and even go above the standards within this document, but not lower, if they wish to be recognised as meeting the standards.

The strategy is based around 3 principles

• Hygiene
• Capacity Management
• Social Distancing
For England, the Government has produced the guide linked above and below, on how to work safely in a COVID-19 environment. It is updated regularly, The guidance helps you to think about risk, who should go back to work, social distancing, managing customers and workforce, and more. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are all taking a slightly different approach but very similar at the top line of protocols.

For England
see the Working safely during coronavirus guide

For Wales
see the Taking all reasonable measures to maintain physical distancing in the workplace

For Scotland
see the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Phase 1: business and physical distancing guidance

For Northern Ireland
see the Coronavirus: Workplace safety guidance and priority sector list

DCMS advice on reopening a gym or leisure venue
see the Working safely during coronavirus (specifically for providers of grassroots sport and gym/leisure facilities)
COMMUNICATE YOUR ‘COVID-SAFE’ STATUS

‘WE’RE GOOD TO GO’.

As an Outdoor Recreation venue or destination, you can apply for the Visit Britain ‘Kite Mark’ [here](#). This is a nationally coordinated campaign by Visit Britain and the Department of Culture Media & Sport that is relevant in all 4 devolved nations and intended to inspire confidence in returning consumers.

Go to the [Visit Britain Website](#) - track to the OIA / Outdoor Recreation link for your sector and start the application process. It is a simple, online, self-certified process that walks you through the key steps we’ve talked about above. There is a help line you can ring and useful links as well. If you can complete the 20+ questions and agree the Terms & Conditions then you will be awarded a Visit Britain ‘We’re Good To Go’ Kite Mark with your own unique number. The award IS MONITORED and there will be spot checks and mystery shops on establishments. You will also need to appoint a COVID-19 contact for Visit Britain to ensure any updates to policy are put in place. If an error is made there will be help form Visit Britain and the OIA, if in the end you are unable to be compliant, then permission to use the mark will be withdrawn.

In addition

Here is a link to a selection of ABC posters to print and display around your centre.

[www.abcwalls.co.uk](http://www.abcwalls.co.uk)

You may also find your local printer, as well as many suppliers online, offering useful generic products too.
REOPENING GUIDELINES

GENERAL

- PHE (or equivalent) posters will be on display informing customers and staff of social distances and cleanliness/hygiene protocols throughout the facility.
- Operators will commit to the wellbeing of their staff and customers, and if they show/have any signs of Covid-19 (temp, cough, difficulty breathing), they will be sent home to follow Government regulations.
- Operators will comply with any health designation documentation that the government implements.
- Hand sanitizer and/or soap will be available for both staff and customers to use on entrances and around the gym.
- Encourage customers to adhere to social distances with point of sale, information and Staff ‘floor walking’. Further criteria is below for certain areas.
- Face masks will not be mandatory, unless government requires this.
- It is down to the individual customer to take reasonable personal responsibility for social distancing when taking part in climbing and belaying.
- Queue management. Gyms will ensure two metre spacing markers on the floor and if necessary, outside the entrance.

CAPACITY MANAGEMENT

- Climbing walls will reduce their capacities to 1 person per 9 sq metres of space. This includes circulation, toilets and changing areas.
- If time slots are used, customers will be managed in and out the centre to ensure social distancing measures are adhered to.
- Any taught courses that are run will be undertaken with full adherence to social distancing guidelines and after a specific risk assessment has been completed.

CLEANING

- Continue rigorous cleaning procedures.
- If Covid-19 case in facility, operator will follow the PHE Guidance – ‘COVID-19 – Cleaning in non-healthcare settings’ while cleaning all areas of the facility.
- Staff will carry out regular cleaning throughout the premises, particularly of points of frequent contact.
- Hand wipes/sanitizers will be on offer (or people will be directed to where they can clean hands).
- Gloves are not mandatory: WHO advice is that it is preferable not to wear gloves but to regularly wash your hands.
- Processes will be put in place to make sure social distancing remains in place for reception staff e.g. protective screens.
CHANGING ROOMS/SHOWERS/TOILETS

• All gyms will be encouraged to keep changing rooms and showers closed.
• Extra care will be taken and signposting deployed to maintain social distancing when in these areas.
• Lockers will remain in use, as long as social distancing can be maintained. Spray and cloths will be available for customer use at common touch points.

CLIMBING GYM AND WARM-UP AREAS

• Wherever reasonably possible ground level equipment will be cleaned regularly by the venue, customers will be asked to clean equipment immediately after use - e.g. exercise bikes, weights in warm up areas, pull up bars etc. Sanitising cloths and sprays will be provided.
• In the case of climbing holds, which are part of the infrastructure of the centre, these cannot be cleaned between uses. They will be cleaned only when removed from the wall before being replaced. Customers should be encouraged to use good hand hygiene with sanitiser available around the centre. This is in common with other facilities such as schools, public transport, trampoline parks and playgrounds etc.
• At all times we will ask customers to use their own best endeavours to keep the centre clean. This will be on top of the regular cleaning schedule.
• Extra signage regarding social distancing will be in place around warm up, stretching, free-weights or training area.

VENTILATION

As per the government guidelines, in Section 5 it states that restricting capacity to 1 person per 9 square meters of usable space will allow for ventilation of 20L per second, per person in venues with no mechanical ventilation system. Climbing walls will ensure appropriate ventilation through either natural or mechanical means. They will use CO2 monitors where necessary to ensure adequate air flow for both customers and staff.

CAFÉ/RESTAURANT

• Cafes, restaurants and bars will re-open when Government restrictions allow and will operate under any guidelines issued by PHE or other national health authorities.
• Additional signs will be put up communicating appropriate cleanliness and social distancing measures.
• Vending machines will remain in place but will be cleaned regularly.
• Government guidance on Coronavirus protocols for food businesses will be followed.
FIRST AID/RESCUE AT HEIGHT

- Although there may be heightened concerns around first aid, this will continue as normal. The below adaptations will be used when needed:
  - Staff undertaking rescue at height will use suitable PPE
  - Gloves and resuscitation face masks will be provided to all first aiders for emergency first aid
  - Face masks for general first aid
  - The Resuscitation Council UK has provided specific guidance on CPR delivery which walls are advised to communicate to all first aid staff and duty managers.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Operators to follow Government guidance for office staff. Card/contactless payment will be promoted.
- Operators may want to consider additional steps for any clientele over 70/with underlying health conditions.
- All external contractors are to follow Social Distancing and cleanliness Guidelines.
The procedures below have been prepared by the ABC specifically for UK Climbing Walls. They are based on solid research and government guidelines and requirements. They should be read in conjunction with ‘ABC Guidelines’ submitted to the government through UK Active. There are 8 sections to these procedures:

1. Hygiene
2. Capacity Management
3. Social Distancing
4. Coaching and Instructing
5. Running Competitions (local and national)
6. Cafe
7. Outdoor Structures
8. Managing Staff

Each section has 3 different levels:

**Government Requirements - mandatory.**
These are practices that have been imposed on the industry or have become commonly expected. You must comply with these. Health matters are a devolved issue so walls should monitor the relevant Home Nation Government website to stay aware of the relevant timeline as well as any variations in guidelines.

**Climbing wall adaptation - recommended.**
These practices have been adapted to the specifics of the climbing wall environment and are practices that you should seriously consider. If you decide not to comply, we recommend that you complete a full risk assessment.

**Other practices for consideration.**
These are practices that have been identified through our work that may help with customer perception or management but the evidence for them helping to stop virus transmission is weak or mixed.

Our Procedures set out minimum requirements. You should comply with the Mandatory Requirements but you are welcome to enhance these in ways that fit your business.

These Procedures are compliant with the Government Guidelines issued for the reopening of the leisure sector on 9 July. You should ensure that you read the Government Guidelines and ensure that you are complying with them.

If you employ 50 people or more, you have an obligation to put the results of your Covid-19 Risk Assessment on your website. The government guidance also encourages all businesses to publish this info, regardless of size.

It should be recognised that whilst climbing walls will take all reasonable steps to prevent the transfer of CV to its staff and customers, there will always be a risk that an infected person visits the centre and either through droplet transfer, aerosol action or smear infection, transfers the virus to others. Our customers should be made aware of this and make their own decision given their specific circumstances whether this small residual risk is one they are willing to take. The residual risk should be no greater than in many other public spaces and facilities that are already open or will re-open in the coming months.

You should display the Government Staying COVID-19 Secure poster once you have completed all the actions in this document.
UPDATING THESE PROCEEDURES

As government advice is either developed or changed, we will reflect these changes on the Procedure document posted on our website: www.abcwalls.co.uk.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version 1: 15/05/2020
Version 1.1: 22/05/2020
Version 1.2: 29/05/2020
Version 1.3: 12/06/2020
Version 1.4: 22/06/2020
Version 1.5: 03/07/2020
Version 1.6: 10/07/2020
Version 1.7: 10/7/2020
Version 1.8: 14/10/2020
HYGIENE

GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

Hand sanitiser or soap wash at entrance
Sanitising (either through gels or sinks and soap) to be provided and required of customers before or as they enter the centre. Sanitiser to be available so that customers hands are sanitised before they are able to touch anything within the centre.

Be aware that some people are allergic to hand sanitiser so you will need to make alternative arrangements for them.

Government Advice

Scientific Article

Hand sanitiser at exit
You are required to enable customers to sanitise their hands as they leave the centre. Hand sanitisation should be placed as near to the exit as possible.

Hand sanitiser in centre
Walls should have strategically placed sanitiser around the centre. This should be outside and inside all doors and should encourage climbers to sanitise their hands before going into and as they leave the climbing area. You should also ensure that you have sufficient signage encouraging climbers to sanitise their hands regularly, throughout their session.

Cleaning frequent touch points
You should identify points in your centre that are touched frequently. These might be iPads, door handles, taps, keyboards, card payment machines etc. Your staff will need to clean these with alcohol or disinfectant wipes frequently throughout the day.

Gym equipment
Where a wall has gym equipment, there should be sanitising spray and disposable cloths available for customers to clean machines and bars themselves. Posters should be displayed, requiring cleaning before and after use.

Regular cleaning schedule
You should continue with a complete and frequent cleaning schedule.

Cleaning if a Covid-19 case has been in your facility
If you are notified that a confirmed Covid-19 case has been in your centre, you should follow government advice on how to disinfect the area. At this stage, this involves cleaning the area well following the government advice. Should that change we will update this section.

Government Advice

Information display
The ABC has produced downloadable posters on customer hygiene. These reflect Public Health requirements. You should display these at critical points in your centre and you should educate customers via your website and social media. The ABC is also in the process of animating these posters for use on your social media.

Hold Cleaning
If you plan to clean holds with a pressure washer, the holds should be quarantined for 3 days before they are washed. This is not necessary if they are cleaned first in acid.
Showers and changing rooms
Showers and changing facilities should remain closed where possible. Climbers should be encouraged to arrive ready to climb and to shower when they get home. If you have individual changing cubicles these can remain available.

Ropes, harnesses etc
You should ensure that hand sanitiser is available for customers to use both before and after renting any equipment.

Rental equipment should be wiped down or sprayed following use with an appropriate and safe liquid. Manufacturers have provided advice on this.

PPE for cleaners
Cleaners should be provided with appropriate PPE.

Government Advice

Ventilation
• The government requires us to have an air flow of 20L per second, per person. This is very low and should be possible by simply opening windows and doors.

• If you do not have a mechanical ventilation system, it is suggested that you install some CO2 monitors that are relatively cheap to buy.
• There should be no recirculation of air and you might want to consider running your system overnight to ensure that the centre is completely fresh the next day.
• Doors that can be fixed open should be. For fire doors that need to close you can buy stops that will keep the door open but will release, allowing it to close if the fire alarm sounds.

Music
Music played in the centre must not be at a volume that requires customers to shout. Shouting increases the risk of droplet transmission.

Drinking fountains
These should be closed off until further notice

CLIMBING WALL ADAPTATION – RECOMMENDED

Staff rota
It will be very difficult for staff to maintain social distance at all times. It is therefore likely that if one member of staff is infected, anyone they have worked with will either need testing or will have to be isolated. You should consider this when building your reopening rota.

Hire Shoes
Hire shoes should continue to be sanitised as normal with disinfectant spray. Whilst there is no evidence of virus transfer through sweat, for confidence, staff completing this work should wear gloves. Hire shoes should be sprayed outside as well as inside to avoid smear infection.

Route setting
You should consider asking your route setters to wear masks. This is due to close and regular contact with used holds and the chalk dust that comes off them.
OTHER PRACTICES FOR CONSIDERATION

Liquid Chalk
There is a great deal of talk about the value of liquid chalk. We do not believe that there will be agreed proof that liquid chalk is an appropriate way to sanitise hands but we do believe that it will be a useful back up for customers. We therefore recommend that you have liquid chalk available for sale as a back up to the hand sanitisation you are required to put in place.

Various manufacturers have liquid chalk products with above 70% alcohol content. Due to the way chalk is applied by a climber (before not after a climb) it should not replace hand washing/sanitising. If a customer wishes to use liquid chalk the ABC can find no evidence that it will increase any risk of COVID 19 transmission. Whether it will reduce transmission is still unproven.

Gym Climber produced a good article on the efficacy of chalk.

Contactless payment
Whilst cash is not being banned, you could consider encouraging contactless payment. It is possible to upgrade your contactless payments to £45 maximum if this helps.

Cleaning equipment
You may want to set a duration after which you will clean equipment. There are guidelines available on how to do this, including the link here.

Cleaning Options
CAPACITY MANAGEMENT

GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

Manage capacity to facilitate social distancing
Climbing walls must allow each person to have 9 square metres of space. This is to include the climbing area and all other common areas – circulation space, toilets, changing rooms etc.

However, this rule should be just one factor as you calculate your capacity. You should take account of the way that customers move around the centre, any particular pinch points and of course the customers’ perception of how busy you are. It is probably a good idea to start with a limited capacity and to allow this to increase as customer confidence returns and the virus transmission reduces.

Wall capacities are likely to be a hot topic of debate and potential disagreement between staff and customers. We advise members to err on the cautious side as regards capacities. You should be able to stand behind the statement: “we have calculated our capacities based on advice from PHE and checked that with reasonable customer self-policing and compromise, you can climb comfortably and safely at our wall and remain 2m away from others.”

By keeping your density down, you should also be able to articulate that customers are able to be sufficiently distanced from others who may be working hard and hence breathing hard.

Managing your capacity
It is essential that you set your capacity and are able to manage it. You may choose to do this through a pre-booking system or by keeping a count of the number of customers in the wall. Rock Gym Pro have produced a widget to allow you to have customers check in and out and you can feed this data live to your website.
CLIMBING WALL ADAPTATION – RECOMMENDED

Managing Capacity
Once the allowed customer density has been set, we would encourage customers to self-police social distancing rather than expect staff to force strict adherence or through, for example, closing off routes or blocs. ABC Posters can be used to encourage this.

OTHER PRACTICES FOR CONSIDERATION

Using customer slots
Some walls are considering requiring customers to book time slots and to pay for them in advance. Depending on your centre, this may be appropriate. You should consider how you will manage crossovers as these could be pinch points for queuing. It will also allow your staff not to handle cash.

RGP
RGP Add on
Vertical Life
Members only
You may wish to consider only allowing already registered members to come into the wall in the first few weeks. This could allow you to manage capacity and to assess your customer’s response to reopening. It will mean that you do not have to take the time to register new members.
SOCIAL DISTANCING

GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

2m Markings
You should put 2m markings on the floor in and if necessary, outside your entrance to remind people of the need to maintain social distancing guidelines. You may also want to put floor markings in place at other pinch points in your building.

Gym equipment
Equipment should be spaced to allow all customers to maintain 2m social distance at all times. If equipment can not be moved, pieces should be taped off to enable the 2m rule to be adhered to.

Perspex screens to protect staff
Protecting your staff from infection is both a significant duty and a business risk. You should complete a Covid 19 Risk Assessment and if you are unable to guarantee that reception staff will be kept at a 2m distance from customers, you should consider a perspex screen or other method of protection.

Face coverings for staff and customers
Face coverings should be worn at all times by customers in your centres except when they are climbing, using exercise equipment or seated in your cafe with food or drink.

This includes whilst on the boulder mats, and moving around in circulation spaces.

The usual medical exemptions apply.

Staff should wear a face covering whilst serving customers and moving around the climbing area or instructing/coaching.

Belaying
Some concern has been expressed about communicating whilst wearing a face covering and belaying. We recommend that customers are encouraged to wear a face covering whilst belaying but should test their capacity to communicate whilst doing so and make a final decision on the safety of this themselves. For example someone with a strong, deeper voice may find communicating very straightforward whereas someone with less projection may find it appropriate to not wear a face covering. Face coverings should be replaced when both climbers are on the ground.

Temperature checking
This is not currently recommended by government so is not recommended by the ABC.

Office staff
Government advice on social distancing for office staff should be followed.

First Aid
Full PPE should be available with each first aid kit. This should include: Mask, glove and protective glasses. If the first aider is going to have to touch or get closer than 2m from the injured party, they should don the PPE. If the first aider deems the situation too urgent they should continue with administering first aid and medical advice should be sought afterwards.

Used PPE should be disposed of in line with government guidelines.

First Responder Guidance
Disposal guidelines
Advice on CPR
Staff moving and work stations
Staff should be set up to work at least 2m apart and this should be side to side or back to back. They should be encouraged to pass each other back to back or side to side. They should work on the same work station for the duration of their shift and this should be cleaned down before someone else uses it.

Test track and isolate
In the event of an identified case in your centre, you will be asked for customer data – who attended on the same date at the same time as the infected case. You must ensure that you are able to produce this data and you may want to inform your customers that you will be doing so.

CLIMBING WALL ADAPTATION – RECOMMENDED

One way system of entrance/exit
If at all possible you should consider separating customers as they enter and exit the building. This does not have to be through a separate doorway but you can direct customers with tape on the floor or physical boundaries. You should consider whether any other one way routings are possible in your centre and if possible you should introduce them and require customers to follow them.

Rescue at height
Staff performing rescues at height must have full PPE available to them. This will include: protective glasses, mask and disposable gloves. If the rescue is going to involve close contact and time permits, the rescuer should don the equipment. If the rescuer deems the situation too urgent and is unable to don PPE, they should continue with the rescue. Following this, medical advice should be sought.

PPE should be disposed of in line with government guidelines.

Display ABC Social Distancing posters
The ABC has produced Social Distancing posters to inform climbers of the need for and issues with social distancing in a climbing wall. You should download these and display either the ABC poster or an equivalent at least 1 for every 100 sq m of your building.

OTHER PRACTICES FOR CONSIDERATION

Other floor markings
Depending on the layout of your building, you may want to place 2m markings in areas other than reception.

For some separate sections of your facility e.g. a specific bouldering room, you may want to put a sign giving the room or spaces capacity. The ABC has produced a template poster for this.

Route and problem density
There have been discussions on whether walls should reduce the density of routes/problems to enable social distancing to be maintained.

In our view maintaining social distance is the important factor, not the density of routes, so we are not making any recommendations in this respect.
COACHING AND INSTRUCTING - BOTH YOUTH AND ADULTS

The principle with coaching and instructing is that ‘courses’ should only return to your wall when social distance and hygiene requirements can be reasonably assured. Clearly, it is easier to adhere to these guidelines on some courses rather than others. You should therefore complete a Covid-19 risk assessment on each course type as you bring it back.

Below we give some examples of typical coaching and instructing situations, highlighting how a risk assessment might lead to them returning to your wall.

Examples of courses you might bring back early, though you may make changes for example to ratio:

- **Performance Squad** - youngsters who are competent climbers, who understand the climbing wall environment and with whom your coaches have a good relationship.

- **Bouldering induction courses** - small groups of adults where the coach and individuals can easily maintain social distance.

- **Level 4 and 5 NICAS and NIBAS courses** - young independent climbers who are competent and well known to coaches.

- **Movement and technique** - courses where a coach helps participants to improve their climbing efficiency.

- **1 to 1 Coaching** - where social distancing should be relatively easy to manage.

Examples of courses where social distancing may be more problematic so you may choose to wait until these requirements have been reduced:

- **Introduction to top roping** - beginners who want to learn to climb with ropes where the instructor will have to be close to belayers.

- **NICAS level 1-3** - less experienced roped climbers where the instructor will/may have to step in closely to manage safety.

- **Straight to lead** - courses where participants go from never climbed before to leading.

**ABCTT Guidance**

Following some detailed work by a group of Technical Advisers and other experts, the ABCTT have produced some very detailed guidance on how to risk assess your courses.
RUNNING COMPETITIONS
The BMC is constantly monitoring the situation and will make the appropriate decisions regarding the cancellations and/or rescheduling of competitions for the remainder of 2020. You are able to run local competitions as long as you comply with all the guidelines above.

The BMC have cancelled all events in July and August and plan to review this on an ongoing basis.

Government Advice on return to training
The IFSC have a web page with useful resources about the return to international competitions.

CAFÉ
When your business re-opens, either to provide a take away service or when the Government restrictions are changed, you will need to ensure that the business is safe to operate. Attached is a checklist that has been produced by the Food Standards Agency to help you look at your business and check that it is safe to re-open and identify any changes. This checklist and further advice is available at: https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/reopening-checklist-for-food-businesses-during-covid-19

OUTDOOR ARTIFICIAL STRUCTURES
If you have an outdoor climbing or bouldering wall, you should use the procedures above and government guidelines to complete a Covid Risk Assessment on the operation of this.
MANAGING STAFF

Symptoms
• Persistent dry cough
• Temperature
• Loss of sense of smell
Should any of your staff display these symptoms you should require them to follow medical advice and self isolate. You should also identify who they have worked closely with and ask them to do the same.

Moving and working closely with each other
It is inevitable that at times, staff will be unable to maintain social distance. Advice is that if you are unable to maintain social distance you should be either side to side or back to back and spend as little time as possible together. Virus transmission is more likely with face-to-face contact.

Staff with symptoms
Testing should now be available for all individuals who have symptoms of Covid-19. If you have a member of staff who goes off work with symptoms consider encouraging them to get a test. If they test positive, it will allow you to manage their return for the safety and concerns of your staff and customers.


Staff Training
By the time walls reopen, it will have been at least 4 months since your staff worked with customers. Please think through this and ensure that you have brought their skills, particularly around safety, back up to speed. Customers are also likely to be ‘rusty’ so particular attention will need to be paid to this by floor walkers.
Important

The above information has been researched and prepared with the best intention of providing a helpful 'hub' of advice and information available at the time and is in no way legal advice or an exclusive recommendation or endorsement from the ABC.

Always refer to and follow government guidelines

Written with help and in collaboration with