

Reopening Your Studio Safely & Successfully – How to Bounce Back from COVID-19

You know movement and exercise are vital to your students' health and well-being. As you consider when and how to reopen your studio, safety must be forefront in your mind. You want your students to benefit from the immune boost that movement provides; you want them to return to doing what they love, to the studio they love safely. This is a complex topic that's best broken down into manageable bites. Let's look at connecting to your community, listening to your students concerns and needs, creating a safe studio space for Pilates, and packaging your programming in new ways that appeal to your students.

CONNECT

There are a lot of resources out there that can help you assess *when* to reopen. Unfortunately, most resources are skewed to gyms and larger fitness facilities versus your boutique studio. This makes a difference, as we all know that what is controllable in a small setting is very different than that of a large environment, such as a big box gym.

Stay abreast of your region's recommendations and permissions to re-open.

- Use this frequently updated NY Times guideline to [See Which States Are Reopening and Which Are Still Shut Down](#). You can use the search term "Outdoor and Recreation" to focus your results on studio openings. You can also search by state to gain insight into regional parameters that have been put in place. Also in this state-by-state guide, there are "Read More" sections under each state for more up-to-date specifics

from a range of sources.

- If you're still unsure about the timeline to reopen your facility, **contact your local governing body** to make sure you're playing by the rules and doing your part to keep everyone safe. Your governor or mayor is the QB passing you the ball on this one, so that you can open as efficiently and effectively as possible. This ensure the welfare of your staff and your members as well as the greater community.
- **Connect with your students.** Hopefully, you have done this all along. Your students care about you, and likewise, they want to know that you have their best interest at heart. If you have been sending regular newsletters and emails, posting on social media, and offering virtual sessions... good job! If not, start now. It's never too late. A student who stays with you during this difficult time is demonstrating loyalty to you, and it's much easier to retain a student than engage a new one.
- **Connect with your staff.** Hold a virtual meeting before you open to hear their concerns. Ask if they wish to return to teaching live or prefer to stay virtual. Provide them with a resource guide, including a checklist of the procedures you're implementing, for them to review. Post a copy at the front desk. Have the staff come in prior to re-opening to go over the traffic flow, layout, cleaning procedures, and responsibilities.

LISTEN

Give your students an opportunity to express their fears, concerns, and wishes. The Peak Pilates® Senior MI and co-owner of Pilates Connections in Dallas, Texas created a survey and sent it out to 350 active and non-active students. The survey assessed what students deemed important in feeling safe enough to return to the studio for in person sessions. The questions

included:

- Taking temperatures at the door
- Mask wearing for student and instructor
- Personal Pilates Pack (students owning and using their own handles, straps, reformer covers, socks, gloves)
- Social distancing
- Cleaning practices
- Continuing virtual lessons post re-opening

The response was huge and helpful in the owners' ability to make informed studio decisions. Approximately 50% of the respondents wish to continue with virtual sessions for now. Personal Pilates Pack usage and social distancing were almost unanimous, while taking temperatures was not considered very important.

As a result, Pilates Connections is able to take the information gained and customize an opening plan for their clientele. Do the same for your studio!

CREATING A SAFE STUDIO SPACE

First understand and follow the basics (you very likely already are), then get equipped with industry-specific information. Your safety plan needs to focus on prevention and include personal protection, social distancing and cleaning.

Resource: [Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes.](#)

PERSONAL PROTECTION

Again, check regional and industry recommendations. Set and enforce a firm policy that students or staff who are sick (or possibly exposed) are to stay home. Plan that instructors and

possibly students wear masks. Require students to wear socks or specialized Pilates footwear and possibly workout gloves. Peak Pilates® will be selling Personal Pilates Packs for students who wish to increase their safety by owning and bringing their own handles and straps. Recommend students bring their own mat, or mat towel. Reformer towels are also on the market which enclose the carriage, shoulder rests and head rests. They are also washable. Students can purchase these through saltandhoneyus.com. Other recommendations:

- Have students bring a towel (or supply clean towels) to put over pillows and wedges to class.
- On a nice day, open the door. Freshen the air to clear out cleaning product smells and to boost immune systems.
- Remind students to sanitize their hands when they enter and exit.
- Sterilization wrap can be used on handles and foot bars and discarded after use.
- You can also encourage students to purchase a [Personal Pilates Pack](#) kit – loops and handles for them to have as their own personal items that they use at a studio.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

- **No touching.** For many of us this will be the hardest aspect about returning to live teaching. We love our tactile cues and so do our students. However, for now, touch is off limits. Hone your other teaching skills such as vocal intonation and imagery to help fill in the gaps.
- **Use personal distance signage in your studio.** While it may be that everyone knows that personal distancing is the rule, signage will offer a consistent reminder to members that you are honoring and acknowledging the guidelines and will continue to do so with their best interests in mind...for as long as needed.

- **Be mindful of general foot traffic through your facility.** Create directional floor graphics with built-in social distancing, so no one has to guess where to walk.
- **Consider creating new floor layouts to incorporate social distance spacing.** Adhere to your regional requirements. For example, studios in the Dallas area are allowed to operate at 25% occupancy. This impacts the way they have to schedule and plan.
 - Set up a hand sanitizing station at the entry way, and if possible, locate others throughout the studio.
 - Arrange your Pilates apparatus with at least eight feet of space between each piece. This leaves a few extra feet to accommodate teachers.
 - Consider moving extra units that do not fit into the new floor plan out of the way until more students can be accommodated.
 - Create a personalized area in each corner of your studio with enough equipment for a full session to maximize social distancing.
 - Have cleaning supplies at each station.
- **Ensure that there is ample space where people enter, exit, and change.**
 - You may need to remove or rearrange furniture, cubbies, or lockers to provide enough empty space where members enter and prepare for classes.
 - Block off cubby or locker space to create room for social distancing.
- **Think outside the studio box.** Maybe your Pilates studio isn't the only option for classes.
 - Is there a large area that will allow for more space to be utilized, such as a hallway or even an outdoor space?
 - Stagger reformers and towers to be opposite-facing (footbar and tower end alternating).
- **Schedule classes with spacing, community and cleaning in**

mind.

- It's time to re-think those back-to-back sessions. Allow enough time between each session to clean the room and to prevent groups of people from exiting and entering at the same time.
- Depending on the size of your studio you might ask students to wait outside until their session time. They can text you to ask if they can enter to eliminate students passing through the door at the same time.
- Set aside special times for seniors and other high risk students when they can work in more seclusion.
- Allow a minimum of 10 minutes cleaning time in between sessions.

CLEAN, CLEAN, CLEAN

While COVID-19 is not transmitted specifically through sweat, it can find its way onto frequently touched items or by way of a sneeze. Therefore, the big topic that everyone is talking about is how to disinfect. Whether you're after wipes or sprays, the plus of a disinfectant is that it kills pathogens. That is what you are after to minimize COVID-19 risk. There are over [3,000 disinfectant products approved by the EPA](#). Because some people may be quite sensitive to the fumes from cleaning products, also consider proper ventilation when using them.

- Biologist Karissa Issac shares that **warm soapy water** has been shown to effectively dissolve the lipid bilayer of viral compounds, and when you add the plant-powered punch of essential oils with antiviral properties, you've got a potent powerhouse that is also toxin-free and uplifting.
- As a primer to any significant disinfectant solution,

you may wish to take note of this advice: [doTERRA On Guard Cleaner Concentrate](#) is designed to be the **ideal natural cleaner**. It is fortified with the proprietary doTERRA On Guard Protective Blend of Wild Orange, Clove, Cinnamon, Eucalyptus, and Rosemary CPTG Certified Pure Therapeutic Grade® essential oils, which provide natural protection against certain environmental factors while elevating the overall cleaning capability.

- **Elbow grease is essential.** Students should clean every surface they touch, wood frames, springs, footbars, boxes, bars, props, straps and ropes; not just wiping off, but gently scrubbing these surfaces.
- **Set up a schedule for deep cleaning.** Keep in mind that disinfectant continues to clean for 4-5 hours, so you'll want to schedule your cleaning rotation before that time elapses. So before opening or at the end of the day, lunch or slow times...
 - Don't forget bathrooms, door handles, light switches, basically, anything people touch. Use a disinfectant for this.
- **To prevent damage to your equipment, do not use Clorox, alcohol wipes, or Lysol (or any spray containing them) on the upholstery.** Using these products will shorten the life of your Pilates equipment aesthetically.
- **Investigate using anti-viral cleaners.**
- **Electrostatic cleaning products** (charged electro-particles that adhere best to surfaces *and* can find their way into hard-to-reach nooks and crannies), have entered the market for good. [EvaClean](#) makes an electrostatic sprayer that uses tablets that dilute in water, making it easy to keep a supply of cleaning solution on hand without storing large jugs. They also make a product called [Purone](#) for cleaning.

As far as the actual disinfecting process itself, schedule interval cleaning teams (before peak hours). Spray down all

equipment then give it a ten-minute “dwell time.” This will ensure the disinfectant kills the pathogens. Keep in mind that disinfectant continues to clean for 4-5 hours, so you’ll want to schedule your next cleaning rotation before that time elapses.

Another upgrade to make to your facility are “sanitation stations” in the corners of your studio. You can even brand them with your logo to draw attention to them. Along those lines, take every possible opportunity to both educate members about your facility’s protocols as well as ensure their trust in you – that you have their best interests at heart.

PACKAGES AND PROGRAMMING

Start with what you have and then work to build a new vision. If you have a small studio, group classes might not be viable for a while. Virtual isn’t going to disappear, so keep your virtual classes and private options going.

Business Consultant, Kathryn Coyle advises, “Don’t stick with the same packaging plan and expect the same results. Now is the time to reinvent offerings. Think in terms of “would you like to super-size that”? Her recent webinar suggested offering these items:

- A virtual group incentive with the purchase of 1:1
- Homework videos
- Weekly frequency discount
- Supplemental Group Sessions that go beyond Pilates: yoga, strength, balance & control, etc.
- Membership for unlimited virtual classes
- Access to the studio’s video library

As you move ahead in the weeks and months to come, we wish you every success. Now is the time for bold innovation combined with stringent safety measures! Peak Pilates® is proud to

support you.

More Resources:

- [Personal Pilates Packs with handles and straps](#)
- [Coronavirus Resource for Health Clubs](#)– IHRSA’s portal offers “a comprehensive list of all IHRSA resources created to help health clubs navigate the coronavirus outbreak.” The page is updated regularly.
- [NY Times Coronavirus Reopen Map \(US\)](#)
- [IHRSA Coronavirus Resources for Health Clubs](#)

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