



December 10, 2020

The Honorable Tim Walz
Governor of Minnesota
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

via electronic delivery

Dear Governor Walz,

For the last three weeks, Minnesota gyms, health clubs, fitness centers, and other similar facilities have been closed pursuant to Executive Order 20-99. Since the announcement, lawmakers have been working closely with these organizations and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) in an effort to better understand the decision to include these businesses in your executive order.

While we share a common goal of keeping Minnesotans safe and slowing the spread of the pandemic, the data simply does not support keeping these facilities closed. It is devastating to the business, their employees, and the health and wellness of Minnesotans who rely on their services.

We respectfully urge you to review the data and allow gyms, health clubs, fitness centers, and other similar facilities to reopen on December 18, if not sooner. Furthermore, we urge you or your administration to meet with representatives from these businesses. Many of these organizations have expressed publicly their willingness to build on their already industry-leading protection measures to keep their clients safe and are ready to implement these measures immediately if they are allowed to reopen their doors.

As you consult with MDH and other stakeholders, we urge you to consider the following shared with us by the YMCA and Lifetime Fitness:

- Across 35 Minnesota YMCA locations since reopening in June there have been just 30 cases traced back to a YMCA out of 1,465,118 visits — a rate of .002%.

- Across 23 Minnesota Life Time locations, there have been just 352 cases out of 3.17 million visits.
- Nationally, gyms are seeing similarly low numbers; according to a letter from Life Time, Anytime, Snap and Rochester Athletic Club, members of more than 2,800 health clubs across the nation logged 49.4 million visits, but just 1,155 cases. This again is just .002% of all visits results in spread. Fractionally, that's about 1 case for every 42,770 visits.

Similarly, data from MDH fails to make the case for continued closure:

- At the time that EO 20-99 shut down fitness facilities, the state had cataloged 242,000 COVID cases. Only 747 of those cases were traced back to gyms or .3% of all cases.
- MDH argues that gyms account for 8.4% of total cases (restaurants plus social settings) related to outbreaks (734/8,767). Looking at these MDH cases related to "outbreaks", 180 have occurred at college gyms (80 at the UMN; 23 at MSU-Mankato; 21 at Winona State; 19 at UMD; 17 at St. Thomas; 13 at St. John's; and 7 at St. Benedict's). When you deduct these cases, there have been just 554 cases at private gyms or just 6.3%. Even removing just the large number of cases at UMN gets you down to 7.5%.
- Finally, the use of "outbreak" by MDH in relation to gyms is misleading. According to MDH's definition there does not need to be evidence of the cases being linked (other than by location) or ruling out any more likely locations of exposure. MDH's overly broad definitions (7 cases across a 30 day period) artificially increase the already small number of "outbreaks" connected to these facilities.

The consequences of continued closure would have a far-reaching impact on the other services provided by organizations like the YMCA and other community wellness organizations such as the YWCA's and Jewish Community Centers.

The YMCA serves nearly 200,000 youth, especially at-risk and minority youth, and 63,000 seniors. They are the state's largest nonprofit daycare provider. The YMCA organizes blood drives, provides classes for cancer survivors, and provides millions of meals to people in need. Just during the pandemic, they have donated over 1.5 million meals.

Finally, health and wellness facilities should be considered some of our strongest allies in our fight against COVID-19. These facilities promote regular physical activity, which improves health, strengthens your immune system, and reduces the risk of many common diseases. It's also a way for many to strengthen their mental health—another major challenge during these difficult times.

These facilities have done everything we've asked of them and more over the past several months, allowing millions of Minnesotans the ability to exercise safely while maintaining public health thanks to their large spaces, air filtration systems, rules on masking and social distancing, and more.

Before you issue further guidance, we urge you to review the data and meet with industry leaders who are prepared to take additional precautions to keep Minnesotans safe. We also stand ready to discuss this urgent matter with you or your staff.

Sincerely,



Rep. Barb Haley
District 21A



Rep. Dave Baker
District 17B



Rep. Pat Garofalo
District 58B



Rep. Kurt Daudt
House Minority Leader
District 31A



Rep. Anne Neu Brindley
Deputy Minority Leader
District 32B

CC (via electronic delivery):

Jan Malcolm, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Health
Steve Grove, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development