

# WASHINGTON INDOOR CLIMBING COALITION

December 15th, 2020

The Honorable Jay Inslee  
Governor of the State of Washington  
Office of the Governor

Cc: Nick Streuli - Executive Director, External Affairs  
Jon Snyder - Senior Policy Advisor, Outdoor Recreation & Economic Development

Dear Governor Inslee,

On behalf of the Washington Indoor Climbing Coalition, all 23 indoor climbing facilities and over 200,000 climbers in the state of Washington, we thank you for your leadership during this medical and economic crisis. While many difficult restrictions have been needed it is now time to use the extensive data available to reopen businesses that are not vectors for COVID transmission.

COVID outbreak data is now extensive. Many states in our country, including Washington state, have outbreak data tracking which clearly shows that fitness centers and indoor climbing facilities are not a vector for COVID-19 transmission.

State	Outbreaks Tracked	Fitness Outbreaks	Indoor Climbing Outbreaks
Washington	3192	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Colorado	2528	2 (0.029%)	0 (0%)
Oregon	739	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Michigan	1268	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Washington DC	109	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Further, **New York State** has reopened gyms as of last week; according to **Governor Cuomo** "*We have actual facts we can base our actions upon... Gyms are now one of the lowest known drivers of (COVID) clusters*", accounting for 0.06% of outbreaks, with 0 outbreaks occurring in indoor climbing facilities. This was found after the governor's office reviewed 46,000 data points within NY State DOH data.

Climbing is inherently a socially distant sport with tall walls creating extreme social distancing (up to 50'), using chalk that kills COVID, and is a non-cardio activity which can be done 100% masked. Climbing supports a safe activity that contributes to the health and well being of our community. The data supports this.

A data driven approach is essential to reducing the transmission of COVID-19 while also keeping businesses from closing and people working. The data clearly shows you can save lives as well as businesses and jobs; indoor climbing facilities can be reopened with distancing and capacity protocols in place. **We request you immediately reopen indoor climbing facilities under the proposed reduced capacity restrictions and guidelines. Opening before January 1st is crucial**; please save our businesses and promote a healthy activity in our communities.

Respectfully,



Tod Bloxham  
Washington Indoor Climbing Coalition

## DATA DRIVES DECISIONS

### **New York:**

Gyms now allowed to operate

46,000 Data Points

Household Gatherings - 74%

Gyms - 0.06%

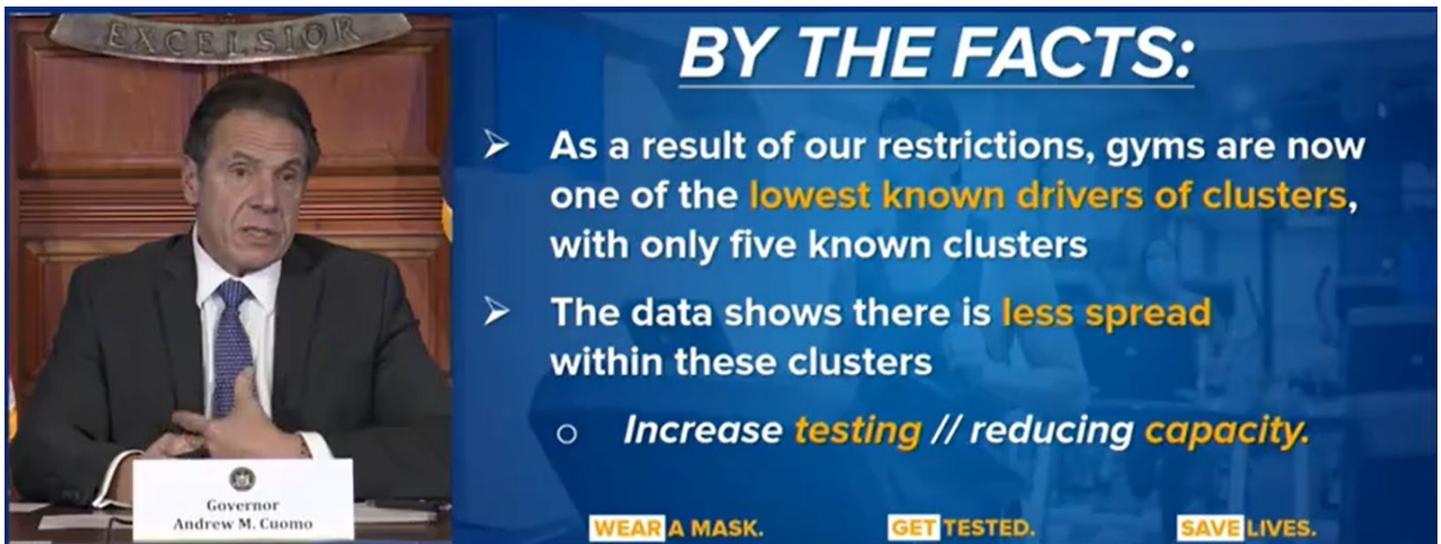
Indoor Climbing - 0 outbreaks (36 indoor climbing facilities)

NY Governor Cuomo:

*"Gyms are now one of the lowest known drivers of (COVID) clusters"*

*"We have more data than any other state.... We have actual facts we can base our actions upon..."*

[https://www.pscptv.w/1ZkKzeznbONxv?fbclid=IwAR0TptO9c0YOf3jzp5juApOejZvNRzxfYi\\_tqaqQN76kEdpe9qJYW7DvRbl](https://www.pscptv.w/1ZkKzeznbONxv?fbclid=IwAR0TptO9c0YOf3jzp5juApOejZvNRzxfYi_tqaqQN76kEdpe9qJYW7DvRbl)



**BY THE FACTS:**

- As a result of our restrictions, gyms are now one of the **lowest known drivers of clusters**, with only five known clusters
- The data shows there is **less spread** within these clusters
  - **Increase testing // reducing capacity.**

**WEAR A MASK. GET TESTED. SAVE LIVES.**

### **Colorado:**

2528 Outbreaks (44,888 cases)

2 Outbreaks for Fitness (13 cases, 0.029%)

0 Outbreaks for Indoor Climbing (39 indoor climbing facilities)

<https://covid19.colorado.gov/covid19-outbreak-data>

### **Oregon:**

739 Tracked Outbreaks (11,095 cases tracked)

0 Outbreaks for Fitness

0 Outbreaks for Indoor Climbing (15 indoor climbing facilities)

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/DISEASESAZ/Emerging%20Respiratory%20Infections/Weekly-Outbreak-COVID-19-Report.pdf>

### **Washington:**

3192 Outbreaks

0 Outbreaks for Fitness

0 Outbreaks for Indoor Climbing (23 indoor climbing facilities)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/data-tables/StatewideCOVID-19OutbreakReport.pdf>

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/IndustrySectorReport.pdf>

**Washington DC:**

109 Outbreaks

0 fitness outbreaks

<https://coronavirus.dc.gov/page/outbreak-data>

**Michigan:**

1268 *Current* Outbreaks

0 Outbreaks for Fitness

0 Outbreaks for Indoor Climbing (10 indoor climbing facilities)

[https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163\\_98173\\_102057---,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163_98173_102057---,00.html)

November 23, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

As an infectious disease physician and an expert in the field of infection prevention & control, I have been actively involved in the COVID-19 response since January of this year. My primary responsibilities during this response have been operational and focused on preventing transmission of SARS-CoV-2 within UW Medicine's healthcare facilities. I also have experience with Alaska Airlines, the National Football League and the Port of Seattle helping to develop their COVID-19 responses. Vertical World, a climbing gym company based in Seattle, asked me to advise them on to reopen safely earlier this year. This letter is in support of the Washington Indoor Climbing Coalition's request to classify climbing gyms as safer and different spaces than typical fitness gyms.

Climbing gyms, as a result of the services that they offer, are very large and open spaces. The gyms typically provide either "bouldering" or a combination of "bouldering" and "rope climbing". In either case, customers are spaced apart and engage in climbing, typically short periods of activity that rely on movement and strength and are not associated with breathing hard (a risk factor for aerosolization). Participants can wear masks throughout all activities. Because of the large square footage and the very high ceilings needed to accommodate climbing participants, individuals or partners are typically spaced out in both dimensions. Unlike fitness gyms with rows of stationary bikes or similar machines, customers in these facilities are spaced evenly and thinly throughout the facilities. These large spaces also lend themselves to very high flow, constant, fresh air ventilation, often supported by ambient air filters. They are essentially as close to being outdoors as one can be while still indoors.

Beyond environmental controls, climbing facilities have effectively deployed clear administrative controls including universal masking, reservations to control density, required spacing of customers, health attestations on entry, barring consumption of food, increasing hand hygiene stations, and closing showering access to reduce proximity and time spent in the gyms. Unique to climbing is the use of chalk by customers. This is used to reduce perspiration on a climber's hands while climbing and has been shown in one study to markedly reduce virus concentrations. Climbers are also able to use alcohol-based chalk products that can function like alcohol gel hand sanitizers. These products are typically applied multiple times during a typical gym session.

As a medical professional with deep experience with the COVID-19 response, I am in support of consideration of classifying climbing gyms separately from fitness gyms. Not only have I advised Vertical World, but I have also used their facilities as well as those of other climbing gym companies. I feel comfortable and confident bringing my 2 kids and spouse. It is important to recognize this additional difference - climbing gyms are accessible to children and family units and can provide an important physical and emotional outlet for adults and children to share a special activity, safely, in the midst of a pandemic (and all too frequent cold and/or rainy days).

Thank you. Please feel free to contact me at any time: [jblynch@uw.edu](mailto:jblynch@uw.edu) or 206-799-7859.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Lynch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being more prominent than the last name "Lynch".

John Lynch, MD MPH



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The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Office of the Governor  
1303 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

As an infectious diseases clinician scientist and the parent of a child on the competitive rock climbing team at Sender One Climbing, I am writing to advocate for increasing climbing gym capacity within the Blueprint for a Safer Economy tiers.

Not only have California climbing gyms collectively implemented comprehensive and effective safety measures that enable a safe return to rock climbing, but there are important elements specific to rock climbing that enable this sport to be evaluated for greater safe access for California citizens. These include the following:

1. **Solo sport status:** First, climbing is ostensibly a solo sport. There is only one climber allowed on the climbing wall at a time for a given climb. This standardly ensures a greater than 6 foot distance (usually much greater) between persons due to the need to ensure safe clearance in case of a fall and to ensure any lack of interference during the climb. In fact, I recommend that public health consider solo vs. group sports separately in reopening plans since the risk of close contact from a team confers notably different risks than individual sports.
2. **Required masking:** Second, the climbing gyms have instituted a policy of required masking. Universal masking is arguably the single most critical component of protection against SARS-CoV-2 transmission. This sport has mandatory masking for both gym entry and for all gym activities. This is another major difference between climbing gyms and many other indoor sports, including standard exercise gyms.
3. **Required use of alcohol hand rub:** Chalk is an essential component of rock climbing. California climbing gyms have instituted a policy requiring liquid chalk, which is chalk dissolved in 70% alcohol. This effectively ensures that all climbers have sanitized hands when touching a climbing wall. In addition, hand sanitizer is well positioned and widely available throughout the gyms and bathrooms for hand washing are also readily available.
4. **Staff oversight:** Climbing is a high oversight sport with serious attention to safety. Staff are normally attentive to climbing activities to ensure safety, and they have been vocal about encouraging distancing between spotters on the ground and other climbers who are waiting their turn to climb.
5. **Ventilation:** Climbing gyms have extremely high ceilings with a large column of air per

individual due to the nature of the sport. This, in addition to frequent air exchange, enables rapid dilution of any respiratory droplets and promotes a safe exercise environment.

Given the efforts by the medical community to address the obesity epidemic in the U.S., it is important to encourage and facilitate exercise during this pandemic. Solo sports such as rock climbing enable a safe alternative to group sports and should be allowed to increase availability as an important exercise avenue during this time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan Huang". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan Huang, MD MPH  
Professor of Medicine  
Division of Infectious Diseases  
University of California Irvine School of Medicine

Medical Director, Epidemiology and Infection Prevention  
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1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95064

November 2, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Climbing centers have many characteristics that reduce the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and make them safer than most other fitness gyms. Climbers can wear masks at all times, and climbing isn't nearly as aerobic as many fitness activities (cardio machines including running, biking, stair masters, crossfit, kickboxing, etc.). Climbing centers are spacious, and with reservation systems they can maintain a safe number of people in the building at all times so that everyone can maintain at least 6' of distance from each other. Climbing centers have higher ceilings than most buildings which minimizes concentration of aerosols, and climbing centers have efficient air handling systems to remove and exhaust air at much higher rates than most indoor venues.

The risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 through surface contamination on climbing holds can also be kept very low by using hand sanitizer before and after each climb, and climbing centers now provide many big dispensers of hand sanitizer throughout the building to make this easy. The use of chalk (and especially liquid chalk with >70% alcohol) reduces this risk further. A well-run climbing gym is a relatively safe environment, and the health benefits of exercise play a key role in maintaining good physical and mental health that we all need to get through this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Marm Kilpatrick".

A. Marm Kilpatrick

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# CLINTON A. SLAUGHTER, M.D., M.P.H.

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To Whom it May Concern:

While in the midst of this unprecedented global pandemic, we are all working hard to return to some semblance of normalcy while maintaining safety to the highest extent possible. As an ER Physician, small business owner, and community member, there have been many discussions, thoughts, and some data to help guide how we can move forward in a variety of special situations.

Some of the highest risk businesses have been the most hard hit, such as gyms and salons, but I would advocate that many of these facilities can be safely opened in a limited fashion as long as the proper safety protocols are followed. I would like to request a waiver for our local climbing gym, The Pad, as I believe, from a public health and safety standpoint, that climbing gyms have inherently less exposure than standard gyms, and they have well-defined protocols in place that will minimize transmission of COVID-19.

To clarify, there is no sustained heavy breathing and no physical contact in climbing gyms, with the ability to maintain continual mask wearing, physical distancing, as well as frequent hand sanitization, making this a lower risk than many indoor shared spaces. I am working on the front lines in the ER and considering our use of PPE in a hospital environment, the policies and practices proposed by The Pad operators are adequate to ensure as high of a level of safety for members and the community as possible. In addition, this is a situation whereby continued closure of specialty facilities such as climbing gyms will lead to their permanent closure, which will significantly affect the mental and physical health of the local community.

I am happy to answer any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out at any time.

Thank you,



Clint Slaughter, MD, MPH