

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: jblync@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