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# Science doesn't support PA gym closures

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Jim Worthington (Contributed photo)

As the weather has gotten colder, COVID-19 cases are on the rise all over the country — including here in Pennsylvania. This spike in cases has left governors across the country scrambling to take steps to protect the residents of their states and cities.

Last week, Governor Tom Wolf announced a new set of COVID-19 regulations. These new regulations include a ban on indoor operations at gyms at fitness facilities.

No one questions whether appropriate steps should be taken to protect the health of the people of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We can and should do everything we can to keep residents of the Keystone State safe, especially the elderly, the immuno-compromised and others who are most susceptible to COVID-19.

Efforts to contain the pandemic and keep Pennsylvanians safe, however, should always be driven by the science.

This isn't March. Governors aren't being asked to make decisions based on hunches or assumptions. We have nine months of experience and a mountain of empirical evidence that can and should be guiding these decisions.

What we know now, that we didn't know back in the spring, is that gyms and other fitness facilities are not a part of the problem — indeed they are a part of the solution.

Sadly, too many leaders — including our own governor — are ignoring the evidence.

Indeed, at the same time Governor Wolf was announcing a shutdown of the fitness industry, [New York released data](#) showing gyms and fitness facilities were among the lowest settings for COVID transmission. The NY data shows that just .06% of cases could be linked to gyms, while 74% of cases could be traced to private households. In fact, Governor Cuomo, D-NY, went as far as to say, 'in gyms and salons, they are not the problem...'

The data from New York is consistent with data from other states. Contact tracing in several U.S. states, including [Colorado](#), [Louisiana](#), [Massachusetts](#), and [Washington](#) shows that health clubs make up a small proportion of total outbreaks and cases. Additionally, a University of Oslo [study](#) showed zero cases of COVID-19 at gyms operating under appropriate guidelines, good hygiene, and social distancing measures.

Not only can gyms and fitness facilities be safely open, it is absolutely imperative that they are in order to give the people of Pennsylvania the tools to help stay healthy.

Before the pandemic, our healthcare system was dealing with an epidemic of obesity.

[A CDC report](#) on adult obesity before the pandemic makes it clear that we are facing a national health crisis:

- From 1999–2000 through 2017–2018, the prevalence of obesity increased from 30.5% to 42.4%, and the prevalence of severe obesity increased from 4.7% to 9.2%.
- Obesity-related conditions include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer that are some of the leading causes of preventable, premature death.

It's a health crisis of our own making.

According to a [report](#), pre-pandemic, from the Department of Health and Human Services, less than 5% of adults participate in 30 minutes of physical activity each day; only one in three adults receive the recommended amount of physical activity each week

The pandemic has made an epidemic of inactivity even worse — particularly during the times of the strictest shutdown orders. An [Evidation survey](#) with more than 185,000 participants reports that between March 1 and April 8, activity levels declined by 48% among adults. With a second wave of the pandemic about to hit, and with the onset of winter weather, we can expect a similar drop in activity levels over the next few months.

Trust for America's Health, in its latest [report on obesity](#), notes that “42 percent of all Americans are at increased risk of serious, possibly fatal, health impacts from COVID-19 due to their weight and health

conditions related to obesity." That's close to half of Americans who are at higher risk of a severe case of COVID-19 due to weight and health status, not considering other risk factors like age.

Indeed, the top comorbidity factors for COVID-19 reads like a who's who of obesity and inactivity.

We know that comorbidity makes COVID-19 more deadly, and we know that physical activity can combat many of the top comorbidity factors, which is why we can and must safely keep gyms and fitness facilities open.

The science shows that the fitness industry isn't part of the problem, indeed, it is a part of the solution. We urge Governor Wolf and Secretary Rachel Levine to let the science guide their decision-making.

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