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# Gyms Reopening May Not Facilitate Coronavirus Infections, Study Finds

Several European countries that allowed fitness facilities to reopen haven't reported any associated uptick in Covid-19 cases



Public-order officers inspect a gym in Cologne, Germany, on May 10.

PHOTO: FRIEDEMANN VOGEL/SHUTTERSTOCK

*By*

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European countries that have allowed gyms to reopen have reported no uptick in coronavirus infections, suggesting fitness studios might be relatively safe.

A study sponsored by the Norwegian government and published this week provided the latest indication that with certain hygiene rules, people who exercise at the gym might not be at a higher risk of infection than those who don't.

Fitness facilities in the Nordic country reopened June 15. Germany and Austria have gradually reopened gyms since May, after policy makers there decided that the benefits of exercising outweighed concerns about contracting Covid-19.

So far, no major outbreak has been linked to gyms, pools and other indoor sport venues, which are all subject to heightened hygiene and distancing guidelines.

The [Norwegian study](#) showed that gyms were safe if rules were enforced. The study conducted by researchers from the University of Oslo and other research institutions hasn't yet been peer-reviewed for publication in a scientific journal.

The study, conducted over two weeks in May, randomly selected 3,764 individuals aged 18 to 64 from the capital Oslo, of which 1,896 were asked to train in gyms while 1,868 didn't and served as a control group.

In the gym-going group, 81.8% visited at least once and 38.5% went six times or more. Out of 3,016 participants who were then tested for Covid-19, only one was positive. It was determined that this person had become infected at work.

The subjects were required to follow hygiene rules and stay two meters from others during high-intensity training. They weren't allowed to use the showers at the gyms. No masks were required.

"The results of the study are applicable to [other areas of the world such as the U.S.](#) or the U.K.," said Prof. Michael Bretthauer, one of the authors of the study.

Mr. Bretthauer said he had expected more people to test positive. The overall rate of coronavirus infections in Oslo was 3.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in the first week of the study and 11.7 in the second week.

"You should be very strict with the measures like distance and hygiene; in Norway, people complied with the measures rigorously," Mr. Bretthauer said.

A spokeswoman for the Norwegian government said that the decision to open the gyms was guided by studies and empirical evidence, as well as by the premise that a lack of exercise could be detrimental to public health.

In most of Germany, gym members must keep a minimum distance of 1.5 meters (4.9 feet) from each other and facilities are frequently disinfected. High-intensity training, such as indoors cycling, is prohibited in some German states due to the higher release of tiny particles through heavy breathing that could linger and infect others in closed rooms for hours.

Exercising indoors is riskier than outdoors, but if distancing and hygiene rules are observed, gyms are safe to use, said Professor Andreas Dotzauer, a virologist with the University of Bremen in Germany.

In Austria, where similar rules are in place, authorities haven't registered any spread of the virus in fitness centers, according to a government spokesman.

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