

House of Commons debate on Covid-19 restrictions on gyms and sport, Monday 23rd November 4.30-6pm

Following a [public petition](#), with over 610,000 signatures, there will be a full parliamentary debate on the issue of keeping gyms, pools and leisure centres open during local and national restrictions.

Key Messages

- Physical activity plays an important role in building resilience for individuals to Covid-19, and in supporting rehabilitation. However, beyond the immediate threat of Covid-19, physical activity and sport contribute significantly to supporting people's mental, physical and social health and wellbeing.
- Whilst we recognise and support the need for restrictions in order to protect public health, we believe there needs to be a balanced approach, recognising the wider health impacts of closing gyms, pools and leisure centres. It is essential that any closure decisions are based on evidence and risk, with consideration for the impact of the closures on the wider health and wellbeing of the population.
- Gyms, pools and leisure centres have been shown to be safe venues that are compliant with all the necessary Covid-19 guidance¹. In light of this, we would urge the government to work with the sector to look at enabling safe reopening of these facilities as soon as possible and to recognise their role as an essential service.
- Reopening will enable communities to access safe, community spaces where they are able to take part in safe physical activity, thereby supporting their health and wellbeing. This is even more crucial as we enter the winter months, with less opportunities for people to take part in physical activity outdoors as a result of poorer weather and shorter daylight hours.
- As charitable organisations, members continue to support their diverse communities. Our members reported that prior to the second lockdown, individuals from most groups with protected characteristics, including BAME groups, women only religious groups, low socio economic groups, disabled and older people, had returned to their facilities upon reopening. The closure of these facilities denies some of the most vulnerable people in our communities a safe space to access to support their own health and wellbeing.
- Reopening will also provide a lifeline to our members who have been severely impacted by the announcement of a second lockdown at a time when they were continuing to rebuild their service and programmes after the initial lockdown in March 2020.
- Prior to the second lockdown, 28% of our members in England were in a position of being insecure or non-viable within the next 6 months². This position has deteriorated since the announcement of a second lockdown, once again stopping all customer income and impacting on customer confidence to return in the future.

¹ Ukactive: <https://www.ukactive.com/news/ukactive-responds-to-prime-ministers-lockdown-announcement/>

² Community Leisure UK Covid-19 Impact Report – November 2020



- The announcement of £100m of funding for public leisure has been welcome, however, will fall far short of the £700million needed to ensure the long-term future of the sector. For those organisations that survive the current financial year, the 21/22 year looks potentially even more challenging, with our members forecasting that by the end of this financial year (March 2021), there will be an average of £900k reserve level deficit per organisation (-305%).
- The public leisure landscape is increasingly fragile and it is essential that we protect it and ensure its future sustainability. We have already seen closures of some of our members due to financial pressures and fear we may lose more in the coming months. Once facilities and services close, it will be increasingly difficult for them to reopen and they may, in reality, never reopen, with the value that they bring to communities lost forever.