



**CanadianFitnessMatters.ca**



## **Tips on Preventing Infections at the Fitness Centre**

Germs (bacteria, viruses and fungi) are all around us on everything that we touch. Like all public places frequented by many people, fitness centres have the potential to spread germs that can cause infections ranging from the common cold and influenza to illnesses with vomiting and diarrhea and skin infections like athlete's foot or plantar warts. The germs responsible for these infections can be on any surface, from the exercise equipment and mats to the spigot on the water fountain to the locker rooms.

The risk of infections does not outweigh the benefits of regular exercise in keeping us healthy. You may not be able to stop people from bringing germs into the fitness centre, or control the behaviour of others but there are a few precautions that you can take to help prevent infections.

### **Practice hand hygiene**

The first step in stopping the spread is to keep your hands clean. Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based rub before you begin your workout and again before you leave the fitness centre. It is also very important to wash your hands after using the washroom and before eating. Good hand hygiene will avoid exposing other gym members to your bacteria or viruses and you will help to protect you from infection.

### **Avoid touching your mouth, nose or eyes**

Try not to touch your face while you are working out until you have washed your hands. You infect yourself by picking up germs on your hands and then carry them on your fingers to your mouth, nose or eyes.

### **Cover open sores**

The skin is a barrier to protect your body. When there is a break in the skin, even a minor cut or scratch, germs can enter the body. To protect yourself, cover a cut, abrasion or blister with a bandage.

### **Check your skin**

Check your skin regularly for rashes, sores or other signs of infection. If you have plantar warts or athlete's foot, you should wear shoes or gym slippers to protect other members.

### **Disinfect equipment**

To avoid leaving germs for the next user, disinfect equipment after you use it. This would include shared mats used for classes. The fitness centre should have spray bottles of disinfectant and paper towels available. Ensure that the product used is labelled with the word "disinfectant" and follow the manufacturer's instructions for use. Focus on areas of the equipment that have direct contact with the skin, including hand contact areas.

### **Do not share personal items**

You don't want someone else's germs and others don't want yours. Avoid sharing goggles, sweatbands, razors, towels or communal bars of soap.

### **Change your towels and clothes**

Use a fresh towel for each visit to the fitness centre. A damp towel left in a locker or gym bag can allow the growth of germs. The same advice applies to workout clothes. Once you finish your workout, get out of your sweaty clothes as soon as possible and wash them before you wear them again.

### **Shower**

A shower will help to remove any germs that you may have picked up during your workout. Ensure that showers provided have warm water and an adequate supply of pump soap or that individuals bring their own personal soap that is not shared. A clean towel should be used for each person and should never be shared. Always put on clean clothes after showering.

### **Foot protection**

High moisture locations in fitness centres like the change rooms, showers and saunas, and pool decks are all areas where germs can thrive. The cleaning and disinfecting that the club does in these areas should help reduce your risk of infection. The carpeted areas in the club are not the usual areas where germs thrive and routine housekeeping practices are sufficient to reduce risk in these areas.

### **If you are sick, stay home**

If you are feeling unwell, help to keep your germs out of the fitness centre by staying home. If you have children who are sick leave them at home as well. Bringing a sick child to the club's childminding is another way to spread germs.

**Common infections that may be associated with fitness centres include:**

**Athlete's foot** (tinea pedis) is a fungal skin infection. Its symptoms include cracked, blistered skin along with an itching or burning sensation.

**Onychomycosis** is another fungal infection. Its symptoms include yellow, brittle toe and fingernails. Washing and drying your feet thoroughly and changing out of your gym shoes and socks after exercising can help to prevent fungal infections.

**Plantar warts** (human papillomavirus). These warts appear alone or in clusters on the bottom of the feet.

**Skin infections** caused by staphylococcal or streptococcal bacteria. People can carry these bacteria on their body and they can cause skin irritation, pimples and boils.

If you are concerned about an infection, see a health professional.

Our best health advice: Wash your hands and disinfect the equipment.

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