



# **Safe and Essential:** COVID-19 Fitness and Leisure Safety Data Report 2020 - 2022





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## Foreword

Huw Edwards  
CEO ukactive



Our sector has shown incredible levels of resilience and fortitude, innovation and agility from the first lockdown in March 2020, through to this current recovery period. Importantly, the sector showed its willingness and ability to come together.

Driven by a common goal from the onset of lockdown two years ago, the sector showed an unwavering commitment towards working collaboratively to chart a path back to recovery, a path that has proven to be complex and unpredictable, but one that we have navigated as a sector united.

Our sector became united in adversity. This empowered the team at ukactive to coordinate both the survival and recovery of the sector. From utilising sector expertise in negotiations with SAGE, and the Chief Medical Officers, through to sharing safety data with the four national Governments to provide the reassurance they sought – as a sector, we set a benchmark for partnership.

Making decisions on the best possible data and insight has been, and will continue to be, integral to this recovery and to the sustained growth of the sector. The spirit of collaboration has been apparent across all corners of the industry and it is because of this that ukactive have been able to host, leverage and to publish our COVID Safety Data impact reporting.



We owe a huge and special thanks to all partners involved. Without your openness, shared learnings, and a united desire to support the sector through this challenging time, we would not have been able to conduct this piece of work.

As a result, the UK set the global benchmark for COVID-19 reporting, thanks to the largest sector safety data monitoring operation in Europe, we were able to collect and analyse over 240 million visit data points, shining a light publicly and politically on a sector that is both safe and essential.

Supported by ukactive's 'Fit Together' campaign, the sector has showed its commitment to maintaining high safety standards throughout the pandemic, helping to reassure central, devolved, and local government, our workforce and the public that our gyms, pools and leisure centres are safe places to work in and a safe places to work out.

The nation has been affected on unimaginable and unprecedented

levels over the past two years. Across this time of uncertainty the health and fitness sector has proven essential to COVID-19 recovery across our communities. The importance of the nation's health in reducing risk is becoming increasingly clear, pointing towards the central role of physical activity in reducing infection and severity. This is an opportunity that we must capture, to become the constitutional cornerstone for crucial rehabilitation and to improve the health of the nation, from the youngest to the oldest in our communities, and it is our data and insight, and our sustained commitment to the highest standards, that will help keep us on course to grow together.

Whilst our sector forges a new path, we must continue to collaborate and take responsibility for working together to evolve and understand our true impact on the health of the nation. Our ability to create an environment that celebrates and rewards shared information and open innovation,

to break the frame on old ways of thinking, and to trust data-driven decisions to increase the awareness and value of physical activity, to society and to government, is a commitment we must all continue to pursue.

So, now is not the time to turn back on this unified approach. Now is the time to double down on the things we have learnt together, to further enhance our information sharing and collaborative ways-of-working. Data and insight is vital in our ability to support, protect and inform the sector. It enables us to benchmark performance and standards, identify key development areas and helps us to better understand our customers and their needs.

Thank you for sharing this ambition for growth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw Edwards', is positioned below the text 'Thank you for sharing this ambition for growth.' The signature is stylized and fluid.

## Introduction

On 23rd April 2020, in the midst of the first national lockdown period, ukactive announced a four-stage strategy to support the sector through the challenges of the pandemic ahead, this included;

- Developing and publishing research on business modelling
- To create a safety framework for operators
- Driving a public information campaign
- Providing policy support for our members

Working alongside partners from across the industry and working with the sector to navigate uncertainty against the backdrop of an ever-changing political landscape, we set-out a framework to support, protect and inform our members.



Underpinning this strategy was a need to benchmark and highlight the safety of the sector with accurate and live data, importantly bringing all channels of the sector together to unify around this common cause.

As restrictions loosened and facilities began to take tentative steps towards reopening at the end of July 2020, it became apparent that in our new data-driven world we needed to be able to demonstrate the safety of the gyms and leisure centres within our sector and show that the robust and thorough operating guidelines are doing their job and keeping customers safe.

## Our approach

### Background

The ukactive Research Institute began to collect data on customer visits and COVID-19 cases from operators across the fitness and leisure sector in July 2020, following the reopening of facilities after the first national lockdown. All ukactive operator members were invited to submit metrics on a weekly basis using a standardised template. Data collection was paused during the third national lockdown which forced facilities to close from January to April 2021. This was resumed upon the reopening of facilities, and continued until March 2022 when all coronavirus legislations and restrictions ended.

The metrics collected included usage (visits by members and non-members) and confirmed COVID-19 cases at facilities (as notified by NHS Test and Trace or the local authority). The number of visits from Environmental Health Officers were also collected. All data was collected on a regional basis to allow for specific geographical analysis when required. Where necessary, additional metrics were added into the data collection process, to obtain more specific information as was required at the time- this included more granular information on 'high risk' areas, statistics on group exercise class attendance and information on the number of staff members being forced to self-isolate.

The data collection process provided an anonymised and aggregated reporting mechanism which allowed analysis and discussion of sector wide data on COVID-19 cases. The ability to demonstrate the low prevalence of COVID-19 cases within UK fitness and leisure facilities on a weekly basis allowed ukactive to support the fitness and leisure sector in validating the safety of facilities and the effectiveness of the operating procedures that were in place.



## Our approach

### Data analysis process

Data was submitted to ukactive on a weekly basis, with submissions aggregated to produce weekly figures on sector wide COVID-19 cases and the case rate per 100,000 visits. The case rate was based on a user making one visit to a facility whilst infected with COVID-19. For contextualisation of the data, the corresponding weekly UK wide COVID-19 rate was calculated using the government published figures on cases by date reported.

Whilst a direct comparison cannot be drawn between these two data sets as they use different methodologies, it proved useful to present the national rate (per 100,000 population) alongside the facility specific rate (per 100,000 visits) to monitor the change in each over the weeks and to identify if the pattern of cases within facilities across regions was similar to the overall pattern across the UK.



## Our approach

### Data sample

Over the course of the data collection window from July 2020 to March 2022, a total of over 240 million visits were tracked by the process. This represented over 2,000 operators from across the UK.

This report splits the aggregated data into three identifiable timeframes:

- 25 July 2020 - 27 December 2020: Facilities open with restrictions
- 12 April 2021 - 18 July 2021: Facilities open with restrictions
- 19 July 2021 - 27 February 2022: Facilities open

	25 July 2020 – 27 December 2020	12 April 2021 – 18 July 2021	19 July 2021 – 27 February 2022	Total
Number of user visits	75,007,464	61,432,759	104,714,754	241,154,977
User COVID-19 cases	1,277	517	811	2,605
User COVID-19 cases per 100,000 visits	1.702	0.842	0.774	1.080

As COVID-19 legislation and related restrictions came to an end (in England from 24 February 2022), the ukactive Research Institute collated the final weekly data stats from w/c 21

February, and produced the final weekly aggregated stats on 4 March 2022.

ukactive will continue to work closely with the Government to monitor

population level case rates, ensuring a clear and efficient process remains in place to re-open our safety data reporting mechanism, if and when required.

## Journey & Impact

Safety data provided by ukactive members was instrumental in the outward facing campaign delivered by ukactive throughout the pandemic. The data formed a core component of the strategic narrative behind our public relations and lobbying efforts, demonstrating the safety of facilities to remain open and building consumer confidence to use them.

The evidence was used by the ukactive Campaigns, Communications and Public Affairs teams to proactively build confidence in facilities and keep them open. We collaborated with the ukactive membership to ensure organisations were armed with the latest sector data and therefore able to present a united front and amplify the evidence.

The evidence was also used regularly to publicly combat bad science and 'fake news', busting any myths espoused by public commentators about the gym environment and risk of transmission.

No other sector was as bold or transparent in sharing its safety record publicly, meaning that our public relations activity on behalf of the sector built trust and confidence among the government, media and the public.



# Phase 1

March 2020 - July 2020  
Closed



**29/05/20**  
ukactive calls for collaboration with devolved governments to support the reopening of the physical activity sector

**23/04/20**  
ukactive sets out four-stage strategy to support reopening of physical activity sector



**07/05/20**  
ukactive unveils recommended framework for reopening the fitness and leisure sector safely



**22/06/2020**  
ukactive CEO, Huw Edwards, talks to the BBC to explain what gyms and leisure centres will look like when they reopen

**10/06/20**  
ukactive launches Fit Together campaign to lead safe reopening of gyms and leisure centres



**01/07/20**  
Government visits gym and leisure centre facilities with ukactive

**28/05/20**  
ukactive and 4Global publish COVID-19 sector impact and recovery report

**04/05/20**  
ukactive announces key policies needed to support reopening of physical activity sector



**08/07/20**  
ukactive calls for stimulus package to put physical activity at heart of recovery

**09/07/20**  
ukactive and partners welcome Government announcement of 25 July reopening date for fitness and leisure centres

## Phase 2

July 2020 - December 2020  
Open with restrictions

22/10/20

ukactive responds to u-turn  
on gyms and leisure facilities  
closing in Liverpool region



19/10/20

BBC Breakfast speaks  
to ukactive CEO, Huw  
Edwards, about gym  
closures in Liverpool



21/09/20

The National  
Press reports the  
sector's case to  
stay exempt from  
new lockdowns



19/09/20

Fitness and  
leisure sector  
reports COVID  
rate of 0.34 per  
100,000 visits  
since reopening  
in England

18/09/20

The National  
Press reports  
'New data shows  
extremely low  
Covid prevalence  
in gyms and  
leisure centres as  
sector pushes to  
stay open'



22/10/20

ukactive welcomes £100m  
public leisure fund from  
Government as part of  
essential support for sector



29/10/20

National Fitness Day 2020  
reports a record 19 million  
people inspired to be  
physically active



18/12/20

ukactive's 'Fit Together' campaign  
wins Sports Business Award for  
leading COVID-19 protection in  
fitness and leisure sector

Aggregated data phase 2:  
Visits: 75,007,464

User COVID-19 cases:  
1,277

User COVID-19 cases per  
100,000: 1.702

## Phase 3

December 2020 - April 2021  
Closed

**03/02/21**  
ukactive responds to Chancellor's Spring Budget statement

**02/03/21**  
ukactive calls for financial and regulatory sector support ahead of the Spring Budget 2021

**22/02/21**  
ukactive responds to Government's reopening roadmap for England as gyms, pools and leisure centres feature at the earliest stage possible for reopening indoor venues

**17/02/21**  
UK fitness and leisure sector reports latest COVID-19 safety data, showing continued low prevalence up to January

**17/02/21**  
The National Press reports 'Government told to prioritise reopening of 'low risk' gyms, swimming pools and leisure centres

## Phase 4

April 2021 - July 2021  
Open with restrictions

**12/04/21**  
Indoor Gyms, pools and leisure centres re-open at Step 2 of the Government's reopening roadmap

**17/05/21**  
Indoor Group-exercise classes re-open at Step 3 of the Government's reopening roadmap

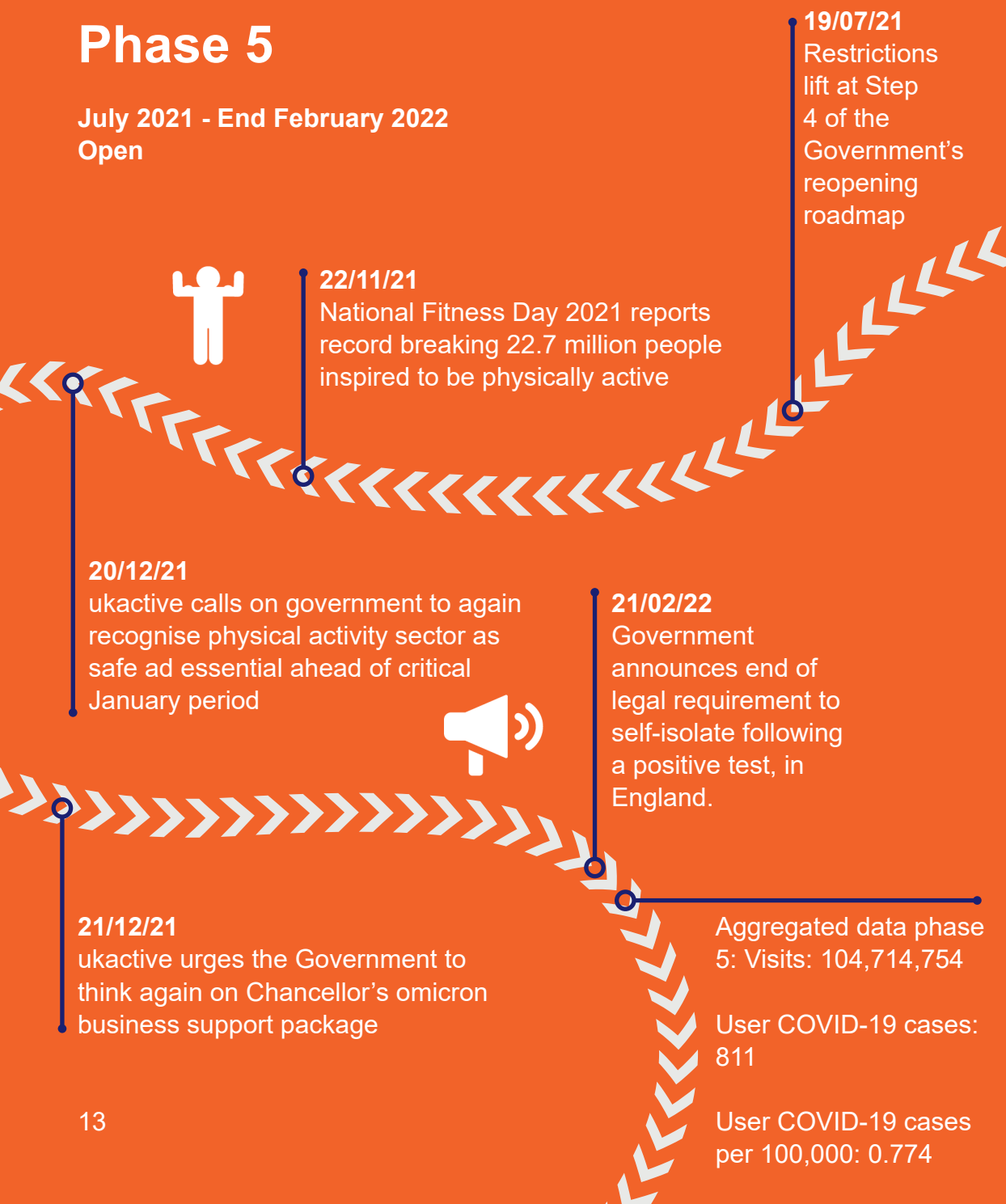
**10/06/21**  
ukactive urges Government to set out business support measures to avoid 'cliff-edge' moment for the sector

**02/09/21**  
UK fitness and leisure sector continues to set benchmark for safety and COVID-19 reporting following reopening

Aggregated data phase 4:  
Visits: 61,432,759  
User COVID-19 cases: 517  
User COVID-19 cases per 100,000: 0.842

# Phase 5

July 2021 - End February 2022  
Open



## Total aggregated figures

**Visits:** 241,154,977

**User COVID-19 cases:** 2,605

**User COVID-19 cases per 100,000:** 1.080

## Acknowledgements

ukactive would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our partners and key stakeholders across the Home Nations, who supported this work throughout the pandemic, from March 2020 to March 2022.

Importantly, ukactive would like to express a special and heartfelt thank you to our members across the sector. It is because of your willingness to collaborate and your unwavering openness to share information that we were able to conduct such a comprehensive data collection and analysis exercise.

For more information on ukactive safety data reporting please contact [research@ukactive.org.uk](mailto:research@ukactive.org.uk)