



Fitness Centers in India

Do they need to be regulated??



This article's main purpose is to assure your safety, so that you get the most out of your workouts while avoiding injuries and/or other health complications. It is imperative that you understand and adhere to each of the safety precautions. It is also an attempt to analyse the dangers associated with fitness centers & lack of regulations regulating them in India when compared to “The United States” & other “European Countries.”

In the United States of America and other European countries, fitness centers oversight involves a process designed to help ensure that the fitness programs and services provided by the fitness center are both safe and effective. The individual and/or group of healthcare professionals' assigned responsibility for the fitness center oversight must make certain that whoever is involved with developing the center's fitness programming is able to integrate knowledge of the special needs of each user of a facility with appropriate health assessment procedures and exercise techniques.

The fitness centers oversight team assists the fitness center in developing guidelines and processes for transitioning members to the fitness center via an integrated delivery system that allows for multiple medical professionals and fitness staff to assess the member needs and make recommendations accordingly. The end result is that all programs and services offered should effectively meet those needs without exposing participants to unnecessary risks.

A fitness center must have a medical director, a physician advisory committee, and/or a physician advisor must be in place to provide medical oversight for the facility's programming in order to maximize the safety of all participants and ensure medically and scientifically sound programs and services.

The fitness programs/services offered within a Fitness Center must comply with current national, regional, and local laws and regulations.

Regulations in the United States & other European countries

United States & other European countries have Fitness standards which cover health/fitness facilities that offer activity-based health and fitness programs/services or that promote recreational physical activity. It also covers written emergency policies and procedures for health/fitness facilities.

These Standards contain requirements related to pre-activity screening; orientation, education, and supervision; risk management and emergency policies; professional staff and independent contractors; compliance with federal and local regulations; operating practices; federal regulations and signage for health/fitness user and/or facilities. It is intended to assist in providing a safe environment for those who engage in the activities and programs offered by health/fitness facilities.

Pre-Activity Screening

Pre-activity screening involves gathering pertinent information concerning whether individuals have an increased risk of experiencing an exercise-related cardiovascular incident while engaged in physical activity. Such information can be extremely useful to fitness centers in at least two ways. First, it can identify those individuals who are at risk and should be referred for medical clearance before they're permitted to participate in the program offerings of the facility. Second, it can help provide a basis for discerning the most appropriate exercise prescription for a particular person.

Pre-Activity Screening Standard 1: A Fitness Center must offer each member an appropriate pre-activity screening process, and refer moderate to high-risk individuals to their respective physician for medical clearance prior to participation.

Pre-Activity Screening Standard 2: If the pre-activity screening identifies a potential user of the fitness facility, as having a known cardiovascular, metabolic, or pulmonary disease and/or is identified as a high-risk individual, the user should be advised, in writing, to consult with a physician and/or qualified healthcare provider, and provide documentation of such consultation to the facility prior to participating in physical activity at the facility.

Pre-Activity Screening Standard 3: The pre-activity screening, established in consultation with and approved by the medical advisory committee/director, should be reviewed and interpreted by qualified staff and the results documented, including referral to a qualified healthcare provider and the outcome of such consultation.

Pre-Activity Screening Standard 4: A Fitness Center must have a system in place for helping ensure that every user has the opportunity to achieve the maximum benefits of their individual exercise and program participation efforts.

Pre-Activity Screening Standard 5: A complete physical checkup before you start a strength-training program. You might have to modify or avoid weightlifting if you have muscle or joint problems, seizure disorders, heart disease, high blood pressure, previous injuries or any other physical condition with potential for danger.

Professional Staffing

Fitness centers tend to require a diverse array of talent to deliver the results and experiences that members desire, expect, need, and deserve (example like weight loss, strength training, weight lifting, body building & gaining weight etc..).

As such, centers must have employees who have an appropriate blend of education, certified technical expertise and hands-on work experience. Without exception, all professional staff members must have the ability and competencies to perform the role and responsibilities assigned to them. Because the programming that facilities provide covers such a broad spectrum of experiences, a vast pool of talent with expertise in a broad range of services is often required. Among the key differentiators that are required of professional staff members of Fitness Centers (depending upon their position) is having a degree and, when appropriate, a certification that has been earned from an organization that has achieved third-party accreditation of its certification process and exam (e.g., a personal trainer certification accredited by the NCCA) National Commission for Certifying Agencies.

The health/fitness professionals who have supervisory responsibility for the physical activity programs (i. e., who supervise and oversee members and users, staff, and independent contractors) of the facility shall have an appropriate level of professional education, work experience, and/or certification.

Examples of health/fitness professionals who serve in a supervisory role include the fitness director, group exercise director, aquatics director, and program director.

Recommended competency criteria for fitness program supervisors in the health and fitness industry shall be compliant with the requirements mandated by local jurisdiction and at least one of the following:

1. minimum of 3 years' experience as a lifeguard, water safety instructor, or swim instructor.
2. Fitness Instructor or Personal Trainer certification, or its equivalent, from a nationally accredited certifying organization;
3. 4-year degree from an accredited college or university in fitness, exercise science, or related field; or
4. minimum of 3 years' experience as a fitness professional in a health/fitness facility.

Recommended competency criteria for instructors, counselors, and personal trainers in the health and fitness industry

A Personal Trainer or Fitness instructor shall a Fitness Instructor, or Personal Trainer certification, or its equivalent, from a nationally accredited certifying organization; or A group exercise instructor shall have a Group Exercise Instructor certification from a nationally accredited certifying organization.

The following documents the rules & regulations containing the foundational source material that constitute requirements of the fitness standards in the United States of America.

1. ACSM's (American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), Health/Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines,
2. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)
3. Occupational Safety and Health Standards 29 CFR 1910.1200 - Hazard Communication
4. Occupational Safety and Health Standards 29 CFR 1910.1030 - Blood borne pathogens
5. 21 CFR 801.109 Prescription devices ASTM F1749-02 Standard specification for fitness equipment and fitness facility safety signage and labels.

As per the guidelines issued by the ACSM, One of the main legal requirements of running the fitness center is addressing the major emergency situations that might occur. Among the situations are medical emergencies that are reasonably foreseeable with participation in moderate or more intense exercise, such as hypoglycemia, sudden cardiac arrest, heart attack, stroke, heat illness, and injuries that are orthopedic in nature



The Indian Scenario

India has a population of near 1.25 billion, Yet the majority of our population are not at the optimum “fitness level” often falling above, or below it. In order to increase nation’s productivity, it is necessary to have Healthy Human Capital. Now, the problem isn’t that we don’t have gyms. It is a manifold problem. Gyms are few, they are too expensive to afford, there is too high a population and very little incentive to hit the gym.

India does not have any appropriate law regulating the fitness industry & Gymnasiums which is food for thought as this industry is highly unregulated & risky & pose potential health issues. The government can at least lay down some guidelines for the fitness industry.