

LETTER SENT TO GYM THAT FORCES PRE-TEEN CHILDREN TO WEAR MASKS DURING EXERCISE

[Date]

Dear [name],

I am writing to you in regards to my daughter, [name], who attends your weekly [type of exercise] class, which she had been enjoying very much.

As you will be aware, this is not the first time I have contacted you regarding my concerns about your "COVID policies". I wrote to you previously on [date] to express my grave concerns that my daughter, and other similarly-aged children, were being compelled to wear face-coverings for the entirety of the 90-minute class. The Scottish government, and governments around the world, as well as prominent healthcare bodies such as the WHO, have made it abundantly clear that face coverings are NOT required whilst exercise is taking place, and the reason for this is that covering the face and airways, at a time when the body is under stress and requires increased oxygen, is both counterproductive to the exercise being undertaken, and potentially extremely dangerous to the person undertaking the exercise.

For reasons that deeply perplex me, you do not seem to acknowledge these risks. You claim to have carried out a "risk assessment" about your activities, which you have sent to me, but nowhere in this risk assessment are the risks to young children of obscuring their airways whilst strenuously exercising over an hour-and-a-half period given even the most cursory acknowledgement. This is an extraordinary oversight, and represents a level of negligence which, I regret to say, exposes you as thoroughly incompetent in your duty of care.

Whilst I am sympathetic to the fact that you are concerned about maintaining your livelihood, which you intimated to me in previous correspondence is your overriding concern (you explained you take the government guidelines on safety as a "bare minimum", and impose your own unsanctioned ideas on top of these, in an attempt to optimise your chances of remaining open), please be advised that no circumstances make it acceptable to gamble with children's health - and this is precisely what you are doing when you compel children to wear airway-obscuring, oxygen-compromising masks whilst exercising. To reiterate, not only does the government guidance not recommend this, it explicitly advises against it. This is because wearing a garment obscuring the airways at a time when the respiratory system is under stress and oxygen needs profoundly increase, is dangerous. This is not merely my opinion, it is a fact, supported by extensive scientific research.

Where it comes to exercise - even exercise as low-impact as walking - studies have shown that mask wearers have significantly increased dyspnoea (sudden and severe shortness of breath which can lead to loss of consciousness and temporary or permanent cognitive impairment) than non-mask wearers. Masks impede the necessary volume of air intake required for adequate oxygen exchange, and even six-minute walks, let alone more strenuous activity, are shown to result in dyspnoea amongst those wearing masks (1).

Researchers have also expressed concern about the possible burden of face masks during physical activity on pulmonary, circulatory and immune systems, due to oxygen reduction and air trapping reducing substantial carbon dioxide exchange. As a result of hypercapnia, there may be cardiac overload, renal overload, and a shift to metabolic acidosis (2).

Leading on from this, at least two children are known to have died whilst participating in exercise whilst wearing face masks (3). Commenting on this tragedy, Lindsay Bottoms, a reader in Exercise

and Health Physiology at the University of Hertfordshire, said: "As you move from moderate to heavy exercise, you may be re-breathing carbon dioxide, which can reduce cognitive function and increase breathing rate (4).

She continued, "There are negligible levels of carbon dioxide in atmospheric air, [but when exercising] with the face mask on, it trebled to 3%. Bear in mind that the UK Health and Safety Executive – the government agency responsible for regulation and enforcement of workplace safety - advises that employees should not be exposed to 1.5% carbon dioxide for more than 15 minutes." (5)

It is therefore irrefutably clear that there is no justification at all to compel anyone - let alone young children - to wear face coverings during lengthy and strenuous exercise sessions, and that to do so can and has caused significant, and possibly severe and permanent, damage to health.

On a separate but related note, [venue name]'s exclusionary position, as per their "COVID policy", on those who cannot wear face masks, is highly discriminatory and likely illegal, as per the Disabilities Discrimination Act and the Equality Act 2010. Many people are unable to wear face coverings for medical reasons, and, as per the government guidelines, are not compelled by law to provide medical certification of this (6), which doctors have declared they will not provide (7).

For a business to refuse service to someone who is medically exempt from wearing a face mask, as [venue name]'s COVID policy clearly suggests they will do, represents a breach of the law, and businesses who breach this law may be liable for a fine of up to £5,000 and punitive damages of between £900 and £9,000, as per section 19 (Remedies) of the Equality Act 2010.

Given the policies of [venue name] are potentially gravely endangering the health of my child, as well as representing potentially unlawful discrimination, I will regrettably have no choice but to withdraw my child from your classes, unless and until these matters are resolved to my satisfaction and as a matter of urgency.

Please reply to this letter within 14 days of today's date, acknowledging my concerns and advising me of the further action you will be taking to ensure your business is both compliant with the law regarding disabilities discrimination, and how you will adjust your COVID policies to ensure you are prioritising and optimising your health and safety obligations to the children parents entrust into your care.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Email address]