

Indoor Low Intensity Group Exercise: A Fitness Leader Guide for Reducing Intensity



Prepared by BC Recreation and Parks Association

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INTRODUCTION

As the Provincial Health Order has placed a restriction on indoor high intensity group fitness classes until February 5 (possibly beyond), the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) offers professional fitness instructors with this Fitness Leader Guide for Reducing Intensity (this Guide) in delivering safe and effective low intensity group exercise classes during the current PHO restrictions. Recommendations include modifications to lower the intensity of classes, and education for participants.

This Guide is provided with the acknowledgement that BCRPA registered fitness leaders are well-trained as exercise professionals with core competencies in leading participants through safe and effective exercise. This knowledge and expertise include skills in modifying activities to best suit the individual fitness levels of their participants. This Guide offers an approach that will help fitness instructors maintain low intensity in all their classes over the duration of the current PHO restrictions.

DEFINITION OF LOW INTENSITY EXERCISE, FROM THE PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR GROUP LOW INTENSITY EXERCISE

High vs. Low Intensity Exercise

The [Public Health Guidelines for Group Low Intensity Exercise](#) states there is no evidence-based consensus on what differentiates high intensity vs. low intensity group exercise, especially as it relates to the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Separating out activities into specific categories of risk is also challenging because an activity that may be “high intensity” for one individual may be considered “low intensity” for another, depending on their physical fitness. Keeping physically active is important, and the intensity of exercise is in the best judgment of the instructor and participant.

Generally speaking, exercise that results in significantly increased and sustained respiration rates is considered high intensity, while low intensity is considered ***exercise that does not result in significantly increased and sustained respiration rates***. Within this broad definition is the overarching intent to support people to participate in important health-promoting activities while reducing COVID-19 transmission risk. There are no recorded COVID-19 infection transmissions among participants in public recreation centre fitness settings; this is likely due to the safety protocols that are in place.

Public pool exercise programs *are permitted to continue to operate* for low intensity group exercise.

MEASUREMENT TOOL

The Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) index is a standard measure that fitness professionals use to gauge their class intensity. To maintain respiration which is not significantly increased, BCRPA recommends low intensity classes should be sustained no higher than 4 and peak no higher than 5. The RPE depends on many individual factors including fitness level and age, and will vary among participants.

Instructors are recommended to educate participants on the use of RPE and to provide regular reminders throughout the class. It is the Fitness Leader's responsibility to check-in with participants to ensure that overall class intensity is kept low.

The chart below outlines the progression of intensity as it relates to changes in respiration.

The Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) Index

1	Complete rest. You can easily carry a conversation.
2	Near-rest. You can carry a conversation with minimal effort.
3	Easy intensity. You can converse with minimal effort.
4	Low intensity. While the body is more active, you can converse easily. Rate of respiration may increase, but not significantly.
5	Starting to get challenging. Conversation requires more effort.
6	Challenging. Conversation requires effort and you may begin to feel breathless when speaking.
7	Difficult. You can converse in short sentences only, and you feel breathless in doing so.
8	Very difficult. You can converse in very short or one-word answers only, with great effort.
9	You are approaching maximum effort. Conversation is not possible.
10	Maximum effort. This is sustainable for only a short period of time.

INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS

- **In each class, provide participants with education and frequent reminders regarding:**
 - the PHO Order and the reason for a limitation of low intensity
 - The instructor's approach to ensure the class remains low intensity
 - The reminder that low intensity limitation will be lifted – “this is for now”
 - The definition of low intensity exercise (from the Public Health Guidelines for Group Low Intensity Exercise)
 - The indicators of low intensity (awareness of heart rate, and Rate of Perceived Exertion)
 - Maintaining 2.5m distance from others while exercising, 2m distance from others before and after class
- **Modifications to reduce high intensity exertion**
 - Reduce gravity by keeping body positions close to the floor
 - Increase focus on form, posture, core strength, flexibility
 - Exercise one major muscle group at a time (isolated versus compound exercises)
 - Reduce amount of time spent on sustained cardiovascular exercise
 - Modify class to reduce high intensity by following FIIT principles:
 - **Frequency of Exercise**
Reduce: frequency and number of exercises, pace of flow
 - **Intensity**
Reduce: weight, resistance, repetitions, sets, speed of movement
 - **Time**
Increase: stretching, mobility, warm-up, rest intervals between exercises
 - **Type of Exercise**
Increase exercise for: light isometric, range of motion, stabilizer muscles, mobility, one muscle group at a time (upper body, then lower body)
- **Instructor Check-ins throughout the class**
 - Monitor participants' techniques to ensure breathing is not accelerated over a sustained time
 - Ask participants about their sustained endurance, “Can you maintain the current exertion for a long time?”
 - Remind participants to be aware and monitor their own exertion level by asking “What RPE are you at currently?”
 - Ask participant about their breathing rate, “Can you carry on a conversation?”
 - Remind participants to monitor their heart rate to sustain low exertion

- **Communicate to participants the benefits of low intensity classes**
 - Improve blood circulation and build muscle conditioning
 - Improve posture and balance
 - Increase joint mobility
 - Improve flexibility
 - Release tension
 - Increase functionality and overall strength
 - Establish excellent technique that will sustain high intensity exercise when group classes are resumed
 - Increase mental well-being
 - The enjoyment social connectedness
- Review other principles and measurement tools, such as FITT and MET
- Adopt language for physical distancing that defines participant 2.5m space as pods, zones, circles, parking spots, etc.
- Schedule classes as required by Public Health Guidelines for Group Low Intensity Exercise:
 - There must be at least 10 minutes between classes where no patrons are in the space
 - Stagger entrance and exit of participants 5 minutes before and 5 minutes after class

SAMPLE CLASS

Duration: 40 minutes exercise

9:00-9:05 – staggered entrance

9:05-9:45 – decreased intensity exercise

5 minutes: Gentle warmup including range of motion

5 minutes: standing posture and stability (RPE 2-3)

15 minutes: alternate lower/upper body strength, mobility, and endurance (RPE 3-4, peak at 5)

10 minutes: core and stability work on the floor/mat (RPE 3-4)

5 minutes: Flexibility, posture, and body awareness

9:45-9:50 – staggered exit

9:50-10:00 – cleaning and no participants in space

Fitness Leader Responsibilities, as per PHO guidelines

Fitness Leaders are responsible to be familiar with the facility COVID-19 safety plan and protocols as they relate to the fitness program and space, and to discuss with the supervisor any suggested improvements. Fitness Leaders have the following responsibilities for their classes:

Physical Distancing

- 2.5m between patrons
- 2.5m between instructor and patrons at all times (instructor area 2.5 x 2.5m)
- Verbal rather than hands-on corrections
- 2m distance when not exercising
- Remind participants that congregating before and after class is not permitted

Audio

- Voice volume at speaking voice – use microphone if volume is higher than speaking volume
- Music at speaking volume

Masks

- Instructors must wear masks at all times unless they are exercising or are in the 2.5m x 2.5m instructor area
- Encourage participants to wear masks during exercise but not required
- Remind participants that masks must be worn when not exercising

ABOUT BCRPA

[The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association](#) (BCRPA), a not for profit organization, plays a central role in leading the enrichment and improvement of the quality of life of British Columbians and their communities. Since 1958, we have done this by championing the power of recreation and parks.

Since 1984, BCRPA's [Fitness Registration Program](#) has identified and promoted the highest professional standards for fitness leaders in BC. The BCRPA has gained recognition as *the* standard against which the qualifications of a fitness leader may be measured and is widely regarded as the regulatory body for 4000 fitness professionals throughout the Province of British Columbia. BCRPA's [The Registry® of Fitness Professionals](#) is a partner of the [National Fitness Leader Association of Canada](#).

RESOURCES

Public Health Guidance

- [Public Health Guidelines for Group Low Intensity Exercise](#)
- [PHO Order on Gatherings and Events](#)
- [Province-wide restrictions](#)
- [HealthLink BC, Physical Activity](#)

Operation Guidance

- [BCRPA: Recreation and Parks Sector Guideline for Restarting Operations](#)
- [BCRPA: Planning for Service Continuity Through COVID-19: A Framework for Recreation and Parks](#)

Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE)

- VeryWellFit: www.verywellfit.com/perceived-exertion-scale-1231117
- Hooked on Running: <https://hookedonrunning.com.au/what-is-the-rating-of-perceived-exertion-rpe/>
- Health and Style: <http://healthandstyle.com/fitness/how-to-measure-to-exercise-intensity/>
- Briody Fitness and Health: www.briody-fitnessnhealth.com/targetheartrate.html
- American Council on Exercise Personal Training manual: *The Exercise Professional's Guide to Personal Training* (not in public domain)

BCRPA is grateful to our Advisory Group of certified fitness experts who created this Fitness Leader Guide for Reducing Intensity

Brenda Adams
Sonja Bidese
Stephanie Campbell
Ginny Dunnill
Marika Francois
Melanie Galloway
Rhonda Jackson
Shauna Jennings
Debbie Jessen
Danielle Klassen
Ingrid Knight-Cohee
Kate Lee
Bev McCallum
Christina Truscott