

# Five Rules to Keep Health Clubs Clean and Safe

Best practices for cleanliness continue to evolve. Here's the latest.

**A**lmost two years into the global pandemic, health clubs have adopted and largely maintained stringent cleaning protocols and air-filtration practices to support healthy, safe environments and encourage more members to return.

As the pandemic keeps generating new variants, operators have to remain vigilant. The fitness industry has faced elevated expectations from members and expanded recommendations from public health organizations, which have ushered in a likely permanent era of comprehensive cleaning regimens and even higher air-quality standards at the gym.

“One of the major outcomes of the pandemic has been a heightened awareness of cleanliness at health clubs,” notes Paul LeBlanc, the CEO of Zogics. “Many clubs have a renewed sense of hygiene, which is vital to attract and retain members.”

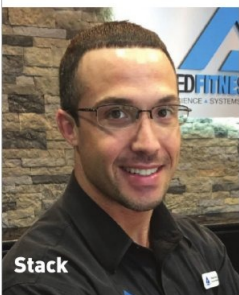
To follow up on our February 2021 article “Clearing the Air,” *CBI* checked in with several clubs and industry cleaning experts for an overview of the current landscape and best practices. Here are the five rules to keep in mind.

## 1 Adopt a Long-Term Perspective

As the pandemic lingers, clubs should no longer consider comprehensive cleaning and air filtration simply as short-term measures, but instead incorporate them as standard operating procedures.

“Our increased emphasis on cleaning will be a permanent fixture of operations,” says Michael Stack, the CEO and exercise physiologist at Applied Fitness Solutions, which has three locations in Michigan. “This not only will help prevent the spread of Covid, but will make our clubs healthy and safer from all infectious diseases.”

VIDA Fitness, with multiple locations in Virginia and Washington, D.C., continues to consult with its Medical Advisory Board to maintain a wellness experience that aligns with the expectations of the medical community.





Hand-sanitizing stations, like GOJO's wall-mounted PURELL dispensers, combined with frequent cleaning of equipment, help club members feel safe

“All of the changes we’ve made in cleaning and air quality are evolutions that will continue long-term because they’ve made our business better,” notes Aaron Moore, VIDA’s director of operations. “The pandemic was simply the catalyst, but these practices stand the test of time.”

Given the importance of fitness centers in supporting physical and mental health, their environments must represent wellbeing, which necessitates a heightened emphasis on cleanliness.

“Successful clubs will hold on to the excellent hygiene best practices they’ve adopted over the last 20 months,” adds James Arbogast, PhD, the vice president of hygiene sciences and public health advancements at GOJO Industries, Inc.

## 2 Enhance Air Quality

To reduce the transmission of the airborne virus, health clubs have opened windows and doors, increased the percentage of outside air inflow, and raised the air changeover rate.

“Indoor air quality remains one of the most crucial areas that clubs should address, whether or not we are in the midst of a pandemic,” suggests LeBlanc.

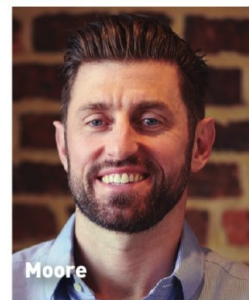
For HVAC systems, experts recommend using high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters with the highest Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) rating to remove contaminants from the air.

Sisters Athletic Club, which encompasses a 17,000-square-foot and 2,000-square-foot building in Sisters, Oregon, switched to MERV 15 filters.

“Among other things, our air-filtration upgrades make members feel comfortable here, and many say this is the safest place in town,” reports Tate Metcalf, the owner and manager.

At Applied Fitness Solutions, changing to MERV 13 filters and increasing air exchanges to more than 10 per hour has dramatically improved air quality.

“Our low visit-to-virus ratio suggests that this has made a tangible difference in the safety of our environment,” Stack points out. →



Moore



Arbogast



Metcalf

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Many clubs also have invested in air purification systems like iWave, XPOWER Air Scrubber, Big Ass Fan's Clean Air System, and the Vidashield UV24 System distributed by Zogics, which is a ceiling panel outfitted with a fully enclosed ultraviolet C (UV-C) fixture.

AIRPHX is another popular option that provides hospital-grade air and surface disinfection via patented, non-thermal plasma technology. Its new CID 75K unit covers up to 75,000 cubic feet of air to suit studios and smaller fitness locations.

"Experts believe indoor air quality will be of the utmost concern for the foreseeable future," says Jeff Kilduff, the COO of AIRPHX. "Our real-world, independent test results show significant reductions of microorganisms in large, occupied spaces."



### 3 Sanitize Surfaces

Given the numerous high-touch surfaces and sweaty bodies at the gym, cleaning fitness equipment as frequently as after every use has become expected. Health clubs provide disinfectant wipes, common-use spray bottles and paper towels, or individual compact spray bottles and towels. These cleaning tools give members peace of mind, and are a good idea whether or not there's an active pandemic.

Lifeworks of Southwest General, in Middleburg Heights, Ohio, also installed sanitation stations in the locker rooms.

"Members use these to sanitize lockers, high-touch points, or whatever they would like," explains Karen Raisch-Siegel, the hospital-based facility's executive director. "They've been a huge hit."



At Sisters Athletic Club, staff also cleans with an electrostatic sprayer throughout the day and after every class. According to Metcalf, "There is a whole new level of expectations from members."

Hand-sanitizing stations throughout fitness facilities now are as common as exercise machines.

"The world is undergoing a fundamental shift in the need for good hand hygiene and surface disinfection, and club operators must have products available where they are needed most," notes Arbogast.

### 4 Engage Everyone

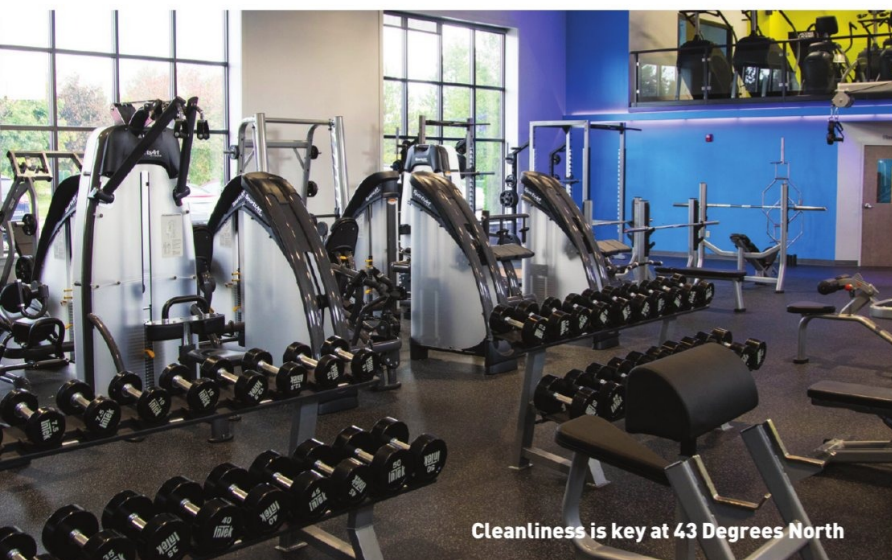
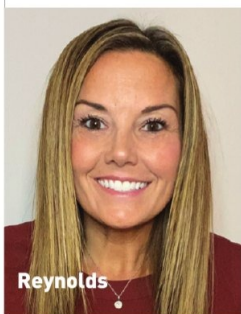
Another must-have to ensure club cleanliness is the full support of both staff and members, which clubs report has been relatively easy to foster.

"We have everyone taking a more active role in cleaning, including members, trainers, and managers, along with our cleaning team," Stack says. "Initially, members were a bit resistant, but now they take pride in helping keep our environment cleaner."

VIDA Fitness members want to keep the aggressive cleaning regimen in place into perpetuity.

"We have a more mobilized membership base than ever before in terms of helping us keep our facilities clean, so we want to continue encouraging that behavior," Moore notes.

At 43 Degrees North, owner/operator Crystal Reynolds adds, "Never underestimate the power of a community with a common goal. We have asked for and get more from our members because they prioritize health and safety and are willing to go the extra mile."



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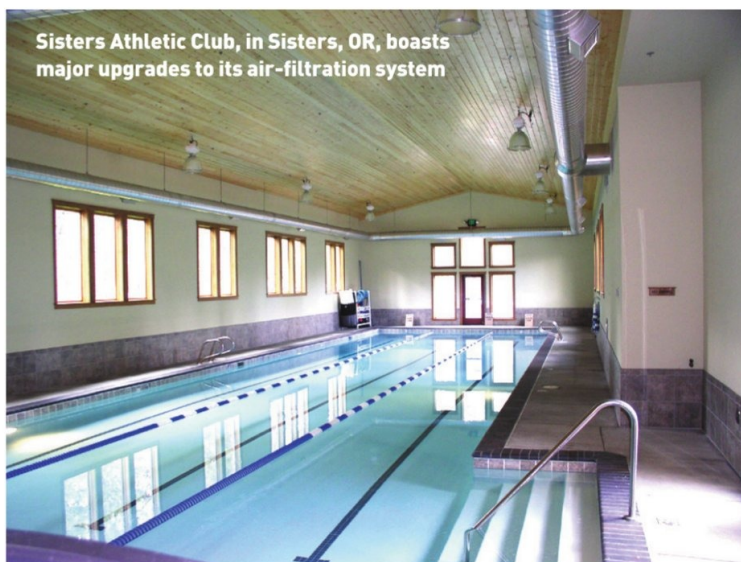
The increased emphasis on cleaning is here to stay at all three Michigan locations of Applied Fitness Solutions

## 5 Never Stop Communicating

With the ongoing uncertainty and changes brought on by the pandemic, it's vital to communicate regularly with members and staff to share what's required of them and to promote all that's being done to enhance club cleanliness.

"The most important thing you can do as a club owner/operator is be transparent, consistent, and frequent in your communications to staff and members," Stack advises.

Reynolds agrees. "Because we're very transparent, members feel connected and appreciate knowing why we're doing what we are."



Sisters Athletic Club, in Sisters, OR, boasts major upgrades to its air-filtration system

### Bonus Rule:

#### Access Resources, such as IHRSA's Active & Safe Commitment

Fortunately, multiple resources about how to maintain a clean, safe health club environment are available. Among them: GOJO's educational webinars, training guidance, and consultative site audits.

Zogics provides a comprehensive *Clean Guide for Fitness Centers*, along with on-site facility assessments to help operators develop a strategic approach to safety and cleaning, supply storage, inventory management, and personalized procurement services.

AIRPHX created Complete Indoor Disinfection decals that clubs can affix to front doors or high-traffic areas highlighting the utilization of the company's technology.

And IHRSA's Active & Safe Commitment is evidence of a club's pledge to follow industry best practices in physical distancing; employee and member safety protocols; cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting; and contact tracing. Upon signing the pledge, gym operators can display an Active & Safe Commitment certificate, infographic, and logo to visibly reinforce their professional standards.

"The community a health club creates is like no other," LeBlanc contends, "and now, more than ever, a clean facility is one of the best ways to improve your bottom line." —

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