

Coronavirus concerns: People working out at home to avoid contact at the gym

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Obi Mora's New Year's resolution was to be more physically active.

Mora, a 30-year-old mortgage specialist, joined 24 Hour Fitness late last

year and started working out at the gym three times a week in January.

That is, until news of [coronavirus](#) hit the U.S.

"I'm legit worried about catching it," said Mora, of Dallas. "I saw rumors online saying that it was in Texas. It made me paranoid that if I do go to the gym, I would need gloves, disinfectant wipes and all these things to make sure I'm healthy."

Now, she's choosing to work out at home instead.

The World Health Organization isn't urging people to avoid [fitness centers](#). However, there is hysteria surrounding being in enclosed spaces where bacteria, heavy breathing and warm, moist air are commonplace.

Some home fitness apps report seeing a surge in users since the outbreak began spreading beyond China. Stock market analysts say apps and home gym equipment companies like Peloton will likely see a boost in subscribers, as more fitness enthusiasts stay indoors. And doctors say calm down: Contagion at the gym is not very likely if you simply wash your hands.

FitOn, a digital fitness company that offers app-based workout classes with celebrities, has experienced a 200% surge in users in January. The company says it can't pin the rise in downloads to coronavirus fears directly, as winter temperatures and New Year's resolutions also factor in.

But the startup's founder said it's possible that there is an undercurrent of people are choosing apps as a way to avoid getting sick.

"We are definitely seeing exceptionally strong growth from people working out from home and a strong increase in usage over the past

several weeks," said Cook, a former Fitbit executive. She added that the "access to trainers in your living room" and "not having to worry about the germs or the fees at the gym" could have contributed to the boom.

Big tech companies like Apple with supply chains anchored in China are taking a hit as factories shutter and production is disrupted. Meanwhile, demand for home fitness equipment from companies like Peloton could be on the rise as people in the U.S. look to do more from home.

Needham analyst Laura Martin said Peloton, along with other home-based services, are positioned to benefit from the outbreak as consumers worry about getting sick outside.

"People will be reluctant to go to the gym as much if they are worried about contagion," Martin said. "They would be more likely to buy a Peloton bike, use it at home for a month or two until coronavirus fear passes, rather than go to the gym and risk getting sick from touching a barbell."

Peloton went public in 2019, and its stock soared for three straight days last week while the market overall got clobbered by the coronavirus crisis. Other companies like Roku and Netflix don't have to rely on hardware from China, so they could also benefit from people staying home more in the coming months, Martin said.

To combat the spread of coronavirus, a respiratory illness that has killed at least 3,000 people, fitness centers both large and small have begun emailing information to members to temper fears and spread awareness.

Equinox sent a mass email reminding club members to "utilize disinfectant wipes." Boutique Nasty Habit Crossfit in Boston sent a note urging its members to "Keep your germs at home!" Instructors at Bella Prana Yoga in Tampa, Florida, will be "limiting hands-on contact" with

studiogoers in the wake of the illness.

A Planet Fitness in Denton, Texas, took a different approach, according to 22-year-old Tania Alemán.

For the past two years, gymgoers would hand their membership badges to a receptionist who scans them in, Alemán said. But in the wake of the spreading illness, "the receptionist pointed to the scanner and goes, "You scan it. We're trying to stop coronavirus from spreading."

Much of the fear surrounding the outbreak is valid. There's still some mystery surrounding the respiratory illness, which has popped up in parts of the U.S. And studies have shown that gym equipment harbors more germs than toilet seats.

Still, medical professionals say the odds of catching a virus while working out are negligible, at best.

"If you walk by someone who's 15 feet away at the gym, the risk of exposure is low if they don't sneeze or cough," said Larry Burchett, a board-certified family physician and ER doctor.

Coronavirus is mainly spread between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), according to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Infection is also possible through tiny respiratory droplets produced by people who carry the virus.

It's possible for coronavirus to be spread by touching infected surfaces, though this is not a common form of transmission, the CDC notes.

"Somehow, that virus has to get into your mouth, nose or eyes," Burchett said. "You can get it on your hands and take it to your mouth. If you're really worried at the gym, squirt your hands down in between touching

surfaces with sanitizer."

Wiping equipment down with sanitary wipes might also help, Burchett added.

Until the outbreak is under control, Mora, who has a 24 Hour Fitness membership, is opting to exercise at home.

"I have boxing gloves, a jump rope and light weights under 30-pounds, so I'm good," Mora said. "I also thought about canceling my membership, but I'm still within the commitment period."

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