

Pubs open, gyms shut: England's health dilemma

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It is raining hard but Bradley, a fitness instructor, and four of his gym rats are sweating profusely while alternating between squats and abdominal exercises in a London park.

Some have yoga mats and others stretch out on the wet grass, muddying their shirts with stains. But there are few other options.

While England's beloved pubs are finally reopening along with the rest of the hospitality sector on Saturday, gyms are staying shut for at least a few more weeks.

So too are swimming pools, nightclubs and [concert halls](#), leaving their owners trying to survive through improvisation, including classes via videoconference apps and even Instagram.

"It's been really a challenging time for us," said Jo Watson, co-founder of the Body Society gym, whose regulars are exercising in the park.

She opened the gym with her husband last year and none of their staff is eligible for the state furlough scheme, which currently covers 80 percent of people's salaries.

"It's becoming really scary for us, I'm not gonna lie," Watson said. "We're not making any money at the moment and we are a new company."

'Inconsistencies'

The UK active fitness industry association expects 1,300—or nearly half—of Britain's sports and leisure facilities to close by the end of the year, eliminating 58,000 jobs.

More than a third will not be able to reopen when the government gives its [green light](#) "due to significant costs resulting from an inability to access [government support](#) and loss of revenue," it warned.

Watson said the hardest part was having to wait without knowing how to

prepare for that moment when her gym can swing open its doors for the first time since March 20.

"We have an idea of what we want to do—put hand sanitiser dispensers, screens at the reception... staggering class times," she said.

"But I don't want to do that until I know that's exactly what the government wants us to do. I don't want to waste that money."

Dressed for the gym, with her hair in a ponytail, blue eyes sparkling and face spread in a wide grin, the young mother said she is trying to stay positive.

But she admits that the past few weeks have been "devastating", and that all the hard work she and her husband put in opening up the gym could be wiped out.

The idea that gyms that promote health lifestyles are staying shut while pubs are reopening is also not sitting well.

"The frustration is that everybody in fitness wants to help people and educate about how to live a more balanced lifestyle.

"Whereas other industries not so passionate about this have been allowed to reopen," she pointed out.

Asked about the discrepancy on Friday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson conceded that "there are all sorts of inconsistencies".

But he said there were logical medical reasons for each one. "There are reasons," said Johnson.

'Look for other work'

Lucy, a London yoga instructor, conceded that her small studio had people sweating in a small room without great ventilation.

"It's probably more complicated than just breathing," she said.

"I do understand this is very serious and I don't want to be responsible for spreading the virus."

Yet she, too, said that at the moment "I am only accumulating debts".

New government rules mean landlords cannot evict people for late rent payments until September but Lucy shudders to think what might happen after that.

"It's likely we have to be all in lockdown again," she predicted.

Theodore Lake, director of Hampstead Gymnastic Club for children, thinks that at tops he can last until October, but no longer.

He fears his instructors, struggling without a steady income, will leave him for other work, and parents will not return their kids to his classes for fear of the virus.

"If I stop for a long time, they might be looking for other types of work," he predicted.

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