



# Best Practice Recommendations for Yoga Schools, Businesses, and Professionals in the United States During COVID-19

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# Best Practice Recommendations for Yoga Schools, Businesses, and Professionals in the United States During COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic has created health and safety challenges for communities across the United States and around the world. Since mid-March, when Yoga Alliance issued its initial recommendations for yoga schools, businesses, and professionals, we have learned much more about how the novel coronavirus is transmitted and how to protect against its spread. Public health experts' recommendations at the local, national, and global levels have evolved, and vary depending on local conditions and infection rates, current knowledge of where different activities fall along the transmission risk spectrum, and the level of collective participation in [risk mitigation strategies](#). All these factors must be considered together to protect against the most harmful outcomes to individual and community health, the economy, and our overall wellbeing.

In the face of this crisis, the yoga community has demonstrated innovation and resilience while making many sacrifices. We have seen different approaches from yoga educators in different settings, all united by the goal of offering yoga as a resource when it is so very needed in this time of crisis, while prioritizing the safety of each member of the yoga community. Yoga professionals are pairing credible public health resources with a community-oriented mindset to adapt how and where they teach—whether that means offering classes and teacher trainings online, outdoors, or in other settings that follow the recommended protocols for risk mitigation. We remain committed to supporting yoga schools, businesses, professionals, and practitioners in prioritizing and protecting the health and safety of our communities.

Given the high variability of the COVID-19 situation worldwide, we recommend that yoga professionals **commit to ALL of the following actions** to guide their decisions on when and how to offer ongoing yoga teaching and training:

- Commit to the yogic principle of ahimsa (non-harm), acknowledging that in a global pandemic, the choices we make as individuals can cause harm to others.
- Use credible public health [information resources](#) on how to prevent transmission and minimize risks. Remain vigilant against the threat of [misinformation and disinformation](#).
- Follow state and local laws, and stay up to date on on transmission rates in your community.

These best practice recommendations aim to guide our community's response and commitment to practicing safely during the pandemic and are based on guidance from leading public health organizations and experts, U.S.-based federal and state agencies, legal advisers, and Yoga Alliance's collective expertise on yoga business operations and yoga practice. As the COVID-19 situation is constantly evolving, this document may be updated or revised to reflect new information, but the yoga community is **strongly advised** to follow the latest federal, state, and local guidance.

This document is intended for use by yoga schools, businesses, and professionals and is designed to serve as a reference guide to support individual planning and decision-making. Please note that these best practices do not take the place of government orders or regulatory requirements, which may prescribe specific operating standards during the COVID-19 crisis. The information contained in this document does not constitute legal advice.

Yoga Alliance recognizes that schools, businesses, and professionals have their own operating practices, space limitations, varying resources and capabilities, and differing legal and regulatory obligations. We strongly recommend that you consult with legal counsel and your insurance provider before re-opening your business and resuming operations.

*Please note: the information contained in this best practice guidebook is heavily slanted towards a United States perspective, but many of the recommendations are universal and may be applicable in other regions around the world. If you are located outside of the United States, please see the [International based Guidebook](#) for Best Practice Recommendations for Yoga Schools, Businesses and Professionals During COVID-19.*

## **i. Understanding Government Orders and Restrictions on Business Operations and Social Gatherings**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, states and territories across the United States issued various orders and restrictions on business operations and social gatherings. Some jurisdictions operated under “stay-at-home” or “shelter-in-place” orders, which directed residents to stay put and reduce social interactions except for limited reasons like obtaining necessary supplies. Some areas issued orders directing so-called “non-essential businesses” to close to the public, sometimes in conjunction with a “stay-at-home” order. Still other states or localities did not adopt any direct orders, but rather urged residents and businesses to voluntarily adhere to social distancing guidelines. The orders and guidelines in each jurisdiction vary in scope, rigidity, and duration.

Just as orders, guidelines, and restrictions were issued on a piecemeal basis, they are likewise being altered, lifted, or allowed to expire in a comparable fashion that varies from locality to locality. In response to rising COVID-19 rates in certain areas, some jurisdictions are now re-imposing restrictions on certain business activities and gatherings that had previously been lifted. In most places where businesses are open and public life has resumed, businesses and service providers are tasked with health and safety responsibilities as a condition for operating.

Because the rules governing business operations and social gatherings vary from state-to-state, and sometimes even from city-to-city, it is important for you to understand the regulatory landscape where you live and work. To find out about the rules that may affect you, refer to publications and announcements from your Governor, your Mayor or County Executive, the public health department in your state or locality, and your most trusted local news sources.

Be sure to identify the following critical information:

- Is your state, county, city, or town subject to an order that restricts business operations or social gatherings?
- To whom does the order apply?
- When does the order expire? When are the restrictions set to be lifted?
- If business restrictions or stay-at-home orders have been lifted, has your state, county, city, or town issued another order that sets new health and safety requirements for businesses and professionals or members of the public?
- Has your state, county, city, or town issued guidance or FAQs to help the public understand relevant orders and restrictions?

## **ii. Making a Plan to Operate and Practice Safely**

Just because you can open your doors for business does not mean it is safe or prudent to resume business as usual. To protect yourself and the well-being of others, you must first consider whether you have now or can develop the space, resources, and capacity to operate and practice in a manner that prioritizes health and safety.

## Consider How COVID-19 Will Affect Your School, Business, or Practice

Consider how the COVID-19 outbreak may affect your school, business, and practice, including:

- Virus transmissions through in-person contact or use of shared space;
- Employee illness or inability to come to work due to other responsibilities (like childcare);
- Concerns and fears of the yoga public, which may temporarily reduce demand for in-person practice;
- Difficulty obtaining supplies, protective equipment, or cleaning products; and
- Difficulty implementing and enforcing health and safety measures at all, especially if individuals are non-compliant.

As you consider providing in-person group or private instruction, decide how you will address the COVID-19-related risks that you identified. You may need to modify how you operated before the pandemic, either by relying more heavily on virtual classes or by altering the configurations of your space or the size of your trainings or classes. You might need to obtain new or different equipment or implement a new disinfection and cleaning regimen. You'll certainly need to communicate with your staff, teachers, volunteers, students, and other patrons. For many yoga professionals and businesses, this means considering a phased approach to re-opening your business that allows you to grow into your old practices and some new ones, over time.

While we understand the serious economic and social toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge yoga schools, businesses, and professionals to be realistic about their capacity and capability to re-open and quickly resume operations safely. It is possible that many yoga businesses will not be able to readily implement some or all of the health and protective measures that will be critical to protecting each other and our communities. Please visit Yoga Alliance's [COVID-19 Resources Website](#) for information on business and financial support, including guidance for transitioning your school, business, and/or teaching online.

## Components of an Operations Plan

When you decide to re-open, we recommend that you develop a comprehensive operations plan. Your operations plan should account for all aspects of your school, business, or practice, including those related to:

- Implementation of protective measures to promote employee and public safety, including implementing social distancing protocols;
- Studio, worksite, or practice space cleaning and sanitation protocols;
- Structure of classes or practice that take place in person;
- Management of reception, boutique, and bathroom spaces to limit surface contact;
- Staff leave policies;
- Continuity of operations if staff or teachers cannot come to work;

- Provision of protective equipment and the availability of handwashing and sanitation stations;
- Training for staff and teachers and communication with students and the public;
- Incident response protocols in the event of a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case; and
- Incident response protocols in the event of non-compliant students or practitioners.

Your operations plan should also account for laws and regulations governing your school, business, or practice, including, for example:

- Government orders setting health and safety requirements for businesses conducting in-person operations;
- Federal, state, and local employment laws on employee leave, work schedules, discrimination, and reasonable accommodation requirements; and
- Federal, state, and local workplace safety regulations, including those set by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

In developing your plan, you should also consult guidance issued by leading health and safety authorities, such as these:

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration, [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Resources for Businesses and Employers](#)
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), [Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor, [Coronavirus Resources](#)
- World Health Organization, [Getting Your Workplace Ready for COVID-19 Guide](#)

Be sure to check to see if your state or locality has issued guidelines that may be pertinent to your business. For example, some states have issued guidelines for gyms and fitness facilities and specifically noted that the state intends to apply such guidelines to yoga studios.

### **Implementing Your Plan Consistently and Effectively**

Once you create a plan, it is important to make sure that you implement it consistently and effectively. Failure to do so could lead to injuries, illness, or even potential liability.

Consider how you will implement your operations plan. It may be helpful to develop written policies and procedures that govern how you will handle certain situations or accomplish specific tasks. It will also be helpful to post signage, both on site and online, to instruct and set expectations for staff, teachers, students, and other patrons in your school, studio, and/or other physical location.

For example, if you plan to resume some in-person classes, develop a policy that sets your standards for:

- Maximum class size;
- Maximum class duration;
- Space configuration to maintain social distancing;
- Rules preventing or regarding hands-on adjustments or other touching;
- Pre-class health screening of employees and students (e.g., taking one's temperature);
- Pre- and post-class cleaning regimens;
- Face-covering rules;
- Rules on the use of mats brought from home and on the sharing of mats;
- Rules restricting or limiting the use of blocks, blankets, straps, and any other communal equipment;
- Personal protective equipment requirements for teachers and students; and
- Rules on the use of facilities including lockers, changing rooms, bathroom, and showers as well as the storage of personal belongings during class(es).

Having a written policy will make it easier to stay consistent and to engage your staff and community in making sure your standards are met (even if you are not providing direct oversight).

Moreover, consider developing procedures, signage, checklists, or other documentation to guide and routinize tasks and to encourage consistent practices. For example, consider creating a procedure that governs studio cleaning and accounts for:

- All spaces, furniture, equipment, and surfaces that must be cleaned;
- Cleaning schedule with increased cleaning frequency to areas touched more often (e.g., doorknobs);
- Cleaning products to be used;
- Process to document that cleaning has taken place (e.g., a checklist or log); and
- Process to document and/or escalate any identified unsafe conditions.

If you work with others, consider how to communicate your policies and processes. You may need to: walk employees, teachers, and volunteers through your new policies; provide handouts and conduct trainings; and practice protocols. It may be helpful to conduct scenario drills, exercises, or workshops to make sure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in the event of an incident or emergency.

## **Review and Evaluate**

As you build experience with your new protocols and learn more about operating during a public health emergency, and especially as new guidance becomes available, set time aside to review and evaluate your plans, policies, and procedures on a regular basis. Ask yourself:

- Are your written documents up to date?
- Do you need to update or modify your plan, policies, or procedures?
- Do you need more procedures to help guide tasks?
- Are there new rules or guidance that you need to address?
- Have you adequately communicated your policies to teachers, staff, and students?

### iii. Recommended Health and Protective Measures

As discussed in Section II, Yoga Alliance recommends that yoga schools, businesses, and professionals develop plans to protect the health and well-being of teachers, students and practitioners, and the broader community. To support this objective, we are providing the below health and safety measures for review and consideration. All of the recommendations that follow are based on guidance from leading public health organizations and experts, U.S.-based federal and state agencies, legal advisers, and Yoga Alliance’s collective expertise on yoga business operations and yoga practice. These measures will help create layers of protection against virus transmission.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the primary method of [coronavirus transmission](#) is close contact from person to person. The virus can spread through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and these droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. COVID-19 also may be transmissible by individuals who are not actively displaying symptoms. For this reason, [maintaining social distancing](#) (of at least six feet) is vital to preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Yoga Alliance recognizes that schools, studios, and other classes and programs operate differently and are subject to varying regulatory requirements. For this reason, the following measures are not provided with the expectation that they will be adopted in totality. Rather, Yoga Alliance encourages all yoga schools, businesses, and professionals to assess their legal obligations, to explore guidance from health and safety authorities, and to use their overall best judgment in adopting and implementing protective measures. In fact, some of the following recommendations may require businesses and professionals to weigh competing priorities (such as the benefits of CDC-approved disinfectants vs. the use of natural substances) and make the best decisions for themselves and their communities.

Recommended health and protective measures:

**Require Face Coverings:** The WHO [states](#) that masks are a key measure to suppress transmission and saves lives and recommends making mask wearing a routine part of being around other people. Many states and localities require the use of masks or appropriate face coverings in public settings to prevent transmission of COVID-19. Use masks successfully in your yoga space by:



- Normalizing the use of masks by requiring staff, teachers, students, and practitioners to wear protective masks to the extent possible.
- Referring to credible health resources such as WHO recommendations for the basics of [how to wear a mask](#), WHO [Q&A](#) on masks, and informative [videos](#).
- Choosing the appropriate [type of mask](#). This depends on individual risk factors, the prevalence of the virus in your community, and the context the individual is in or plans to travel to.
- Posting clear signage in high-traffic areas around your studio, space, and online platforms that clearly state your mask policy.
- Consider providing masks to all students and practitioners.
- Sanitizing all reusable masks regularly and at a minimum between each use.

*Please note that the WHO does not recommend wearing masks while [vigorously exercising](#). We strongly urge you to refer to local government mask requirements as well as guidance on the prevalence of the virus in your community to assess the need to wear a mask during yoga practice*

While the WHO states that wearing a mask can limit the spread of COVID-19, it also asserts that the use of a mask alone is not sufficient to provide adequate protection, and should be used in conjunction with other protective measures, like social distancing and maximizing ventilation. A perfect example of how all of these strategies work together (and why only partial prevention strategy does not suffice) is the [Swiss Cheese Theory](#). We love this visual and find it extremely helpful to understand an otherwise nuanced concept.

**Preserve and Protect Air Quality As Much as Possible:** Experts report that the main way coronavirus spreads is through the air via respiratory droplets and aerosols. The WHO [states](#) that outbreaks have been reported in crowded indoor settings where people gather and talk loudly, shout, breathe heavily, or sing. In these settings, the virus spreads much more efficiently farther than six feet from its source. Considering a huge piece of yoga practice is *the breath*—it is essential to establish proper ventilation and create a distance of 6-feet or more between individuals to mitigate this transmission pathway. Consider doing this by:

- Offering outdoor classes where and when applicable
- Keeping classroom or studio windows open as much as possible to increase the amount of ‘natural ventilation’ when indoors.
- Speaking with the person who manages your [mechanical HVAC system](#) (if applicable) and educating yourself on all ventilation and air conditioning [recommendations](#).

**Practice physical distancing:** Given the nature of this respiratory virus, experts reports that the risk of transmission substantially grows between individuals who are crowded together in close proximity for extended periods of time—effectively, breathing each other’s air. Mitigate this risk by:

- Assessing how many individuals fit within your communal and studio spaces while maintaining 6-feet of distance. Enforce this maximum number of bodies in your space
- Physically measuring and clearly marking where individuals should stand in communal spaces and place their mats in classrooms to ensure physical distance limitations
- Limiting the number of people in your studio at any given moment by taking advantage of pre-registration online services and platforms
- Avoiding hands-on assists and traveling around the room during class as a teacher

**Ask Health Screening Questions:** Screen each individual – staff, teachers, volunteers, students, or practitioners – for COVID-19 symptoms and exposure before they enter your site. This screening should be done each day an individual enters your site. For example, if an employee works on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the employee should complete their health screening questions on each of those days. You may use written questionnaires, verbally ask screening questions when individuals arrive on site, or incorporate screening questions into online class scheduling.

In designing your health screening questions, the CDC provides [screening questions](#) and an [online tool](#) for use at CDC facilities which may be adapted for use in other settings. These questions include:

- Have you experienced any COVID-19 [symptoms](#) in the past 48 hours?
- Within the past 14 days, have you been in close physical contact (6 feet or closer for a cumulative total of 15 minutes) with anyone who (a) is known to have laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or (b) anyone who has any symptoms consistent with COVID-19?
- Are you isolating or quarantining because you may have been exposed to a person with COVID-19 or are worried that you may be sick with COVID-19?
- Are you currently waiting on the results of a COVID-19 test?

Further, some states and localities have mandated that businesses conduct health screenings and provide sample screening questions, so be sure to check your area for local guidance. For example, the New York City Health Department has provided its own COVID-19 [screening tool](#).

If an individual answers yes to any screening question, do not let them enter the site. Individuals who answer yes to any of the screening questions should be immediately separated from others and directed to follow public health guidelines for [quarantining](#) or [isolating](#), as appropriate.

In conducting health screening be mindful of privacy. Health screening questions should be brief and designed only to elicit a “yes” or “no” answer. Be careful to ensure that your screening does not go further than necessary by staying focused on assessing COVID-19-related risks. Specifically, while you may ask whether an individual is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, you do not need to ask which specific symptoms they are experiencing.

Moreover, employment and anti-discrimination laws govern employee privacy and appropriate uses of employee health information. Be sure that you are familiar with your compliance obligations.

**Consider Conducting Temperature Checks:** Several states and local municipalities have implemented orders or issued guidance requiring or recommending temperature checks in the workplace as a strategy to slow virus transmission. Please be sure to check the orders and guidance in your area. The EEOC has issued [guidance](#) stating that temperature checks of employees do not violate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Consider conducting temperature checks via a touchless infrared thermometer of every individual before entry into your studio, including staff, teachers, volunteers, students, and practitioners. But, remember that COVID-19 may be carried and transmitted by individuals who show no symptoms.

Should an individual present with a fever, they should not be permitted to enter the site but rather separated from others and directed to follow public health guidelines for [quarantining](#) or [isolating](#), as appropriate.

**Provide Advance Notifications:** Inform students that they should not sign-up or come to the studio/class if they have a cough, are running a fever, or have been exposed to someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is experiencing [COVID-19 symptoms](#). Notify individuals of the health and safety policies that they will be expected to follow if they come to your studio/class.

**Promote and Require Hand Washing and Good Hygiene:** Require staff and volunteers to hand wash with soap and warm water for a minimum of twenty (20) seconds before and after every registration period. Require teachers to hand wash with soap and warm water for a minimum of twenty (20) seconds before and after every class. Hang [signs](#) and encourage all students and practitioners to practice [hand washing best practices](#).

Post signs in each bathroom and around the studio about [cough-and-sneeze etiquette](#) (covering your mouth and nose with a tissue and then throwing it away, using your upper sleeve if a tissue is not available, refraining from touching your mouth, nose, and eyes, etc.). Make tissues available to the extent possible.

**Limit Contact Surfaces:** The WHO [states](#) that contamination on surfaces is one of the ways that COVID-19 spreads. To be cautious, work to minimize surfaces that are touched by multiple people. For example, offer no-touch trash cans where possible and place them by the door(s). Remove all unnecessary items, like décor, from common spaces. In retail areas, encourage students and practitioners to only touch what they plan to purchase.

Though these safety precautions do not address primary COVID-19 transmission routes as they are now understood, they are still best practice recommendations for general overall health and hygiene, and they can mitigate the spread of many types of germs spread through physical contact.

**Invest in Up-Leveled Cleaning Protocol:** According to the [CDC](#), cleaning and disinfection can decrease instances of the virus on surfaces and objects which reduces the risk of exposure. Create a [cleaning and disinfection plan](#) for school, studio, classroom space, and other common areas. Cleaning should take place regularly. Use disinfectants that are [EPA-approved](#) against COVID-19. Allow for ten (10) minutes for sprays and up to four (4) minutes for disinfectant wipes before wiping dry.

Clean the bathroom(s) before and after each class, including floors, sinks, and toilet bowls. Clean the studio floors before and after each class. Wipe telephones, keyboards, door handles, bathroom faucets, front desk surfaces, and anything else that staff, teachers, or students commonly touch.

**Stock Supplies:** Stock and maintain products to clean and disinfect, including handwashing soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand sanitizers (containing at least 60% alcohol), and [EPA-approved disinfectants](#) against COVID-19. If approved disinfectants are in short supply, the CDC recommends alternative disinfectants (for example, 1/3 cup of bleach added to 1 gallon of water). If you are unable to stock necessary supplies, suggest that people bring their own or consider a temporary closure until you are able to restock.

**Restrict Use of Communal Mats and Props:** Require students to bring their own yoga mats and props to the extent possible. Provide sanitizing wipes or sprays to disinfect mats and props before and after each use.

**Restrict Payment Options to Avoid Person-to-Person Contact:** Consider accepting only electronic (e.g., credit/debit card or mobile) payments, and using touch/swipe/no signature technology. Do not accept cash if you can avoid it. Clean pens for signatures before and after each use.

**Provide Policies for Sick Staff and Teachers:** To reduce transmission, it is important for sick workers to stay home. Develop policies to ensure that sick staff and teachers stay home. Consider your leave and time off policies and be flexible with work schedules. Be sure to adhere to all federal, state, and local employment laws and regulations regarding leave and reasonable accommodations. For more information on employer responsibilities, visit the websites of the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) and [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#).

**Maintain Records for Contact Tracing:** Maintain clear records of who is present in the school or studio at any given time. In the event of notice of an infected visitor, records of others present at that time will be important to help identify who may have come in contact with the infected visitor.

**Create Notice Mechanisms:** Establish notice mechanisms to notify staff, teachers, volunteers, and students in the event you become aware that an infected, or potentially infected, person was at the school or studio. It is important to make sure that you have contact information for employees and students if contact is required.

Be mindful of privacy. If you provide notice, omit identifying details about the person infected or suspected to be infected.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted you, your families, and our community significantly and immeasurably. As we navigate this period together, Yoga Alliance is continuing to monitor our community and develop guidance and resources for our members. Please be sure to visit us at our [COVID-19 resource site](#).

Reach out to us with feedback, questions, or concerns at 1-888-921-9642 (YOGA) or at [info@yogaalliance.org](mailto:info@yogaalliance.org). Thank you for the work that you do for your communities—always, and especially now in these difficult times.