



The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Reopening Guidelines for Climbing Centers

Dear Governor Newsom

We write to you on behalf of 97 indoor climbing centers across California. Given the large size of our facilities, exceptional ventilation, ensured social distancing and other essential features of climbing centers, we are asking you to allow us to open at some reasonable level at the purple stage. You recently made a similar determination for hair and nail salons to allow them to open indoors based on a deeper examination of their risk factors and we request similar treatment.

Like many businesses, being able to re-open indoors at purple stage and increase our capacity limits from that point forward is make or break for our industry. A recent nationwide survey by the Climbing Wall Association, our national industry organization, found only 20% of climbing centers believed they would survive the current economic crisis, whether they were open or not. Please give us a fighting chance.

While we fully support the purpose of the current county-by-county restrictions, we now know enough to move indoor climbing into less restrictive bounds. Climbing is part of a healthy lifestyle and can be done in a very safe manner in our large facilities. Based on our discussions with local public health officials, we believe that we can operate safely under pre-closure COVID guidelines, whether we are purple or not.

For example, professor of biology, Pat Fidopiastis, PhD, is working on COVID research and has this to say about climbing centers and their safety:

Soon-to-be-published research from De Montfort University revealed that the number of infectious coronavirus (they used a close relative of SARS CoV2) drops by 99% in less than 1-minute following exposure to magnesium carbonate and calcium carbonate, the components in powdered climbing chalk. This study is significant because they didn't just look at virus recovery using a technique that picks up bits of virus RNA, they actually measured infectivity of the viruses that were deposited in the chalk. One can assume that with additional time, virus infectivity would be reduced to practically zero.

The combination of the antiviral activity of chalk from climber's hands, regular cleaning protocols proposed by the centers in the coalition, tall ceilings, large spaces for distancing, mask usage, and the overall good health of the clientele makes climbing gyms an extremely low risk for SARS CoV2 transmission.

People use our spaces as individuals, or in family groups, and they stay with them. The guidance of 6 feet or greater was already in effect prior to the pandemic - that space allows climbers and their partners to not be hindered by others. **Our members who have locations in other states have had ZERO cases of COVID19 transmission in the centers.**

Here is why:

1. *We have superior ventilation, air volume, and physical/social distancing ability:* Our facilities occupy very large buildings--both in square feet on the ground and volume of air. We build our centers with incredibly huge fans and HVAC systems that move air, push inside air out, and suck air away from people; air circulation has been a major concern of the industry prior to the pandemic.
2. *Users can (and we require them to) climb while wearing a mask.* They will not spread droplets doing their activity, and they do not breathe hard enough while climbing (an anaerobic workout) to generate concerns of hazards of heavy breathing in masks.
3. *Studies suggest [chalk kills the virus](#) -* making contact points safer than other community gathering areas. Centers have mandated the use of liquid chalk made up of at least 80% ethanol alcohol, which has been [shown to kill the virus](#), limiting spread. This is consistent with recommendations from CDPH, CDC, and WHO.
4. *All centers have adopted policies to support the guidelines provided by California for fitness centers. [This is a link to one member's policy, which many across the country have adopted](#) -* we made it public so that they could utilize it themselves. Others have added extra measures to aid in contact tracing, health questionnaires and waivers, etc.

We are asking for a closer look because:

1. *We cannot operate outside.* Our businesses are literally built around tall, engineered, indoor climbing structures made of steel, wood, and concrete that range from 15 to 60 feet high that cannot be moved.
2. *We are heavily involved in community empowerment and support -* our industry supports community based organizations broadly from charity birthday parties to mentorship nonprofits like Big Brothers Big Sisters to working with people on the spectrum or those who come from underserved communities. We continue to provide tangible services to these organizations that are also under threat of permanently going under and are losing their funding streams. It costs us nothing to keep these charitable operations going as long as we are allowed to operate.

Climbing centers are part of the character of California and the American West. The ethos of outdoor experiences and recreation is vital to the mental and physical health of Californians, and now more than ever before. But our economic struggles may crush the Western spirit we seek to embrace, and we worry that permanent widespread closures in our industry will have greater ramifications on outdoor recreational opportunities for many Californians.


Indoor climbing centers are dying - The Pad Climbing's second location in Santa Maria and Desert Rocks in Palm Springs are permanently closed - and will not rebound quickly: open locations around the country are reporting revenues of only 40% what they were at closure. Our industry has high overhead: we have huge rent/mortgage payments and we have made enormous capital investments. Almost all of us did not pay for our climbing centers with cash; we financed the hundreds of thousands--and in some cases, millions--of dollars. The hundreds of tons of wood and steel and plastic are bespoke to their locations and cannot easily find another home, particularly if there is a huge cloud of uncertainty over our ability to operate. This financing means we continue to pay huge debt service whether we operate or not.

Please work with us to expedite the safe and mindful opening of the 97 climbing centers throughout the state. **We are specifically requesting to be able to open at 25% capacity immediately.** One of our member organizations, located in Sacramento, has offered their facility to be toured by an appropriate member of your team or the California Department of Public Health to corroborate our claims and verify our procedures.

We appreciate the enormity of this moment and the pressure you and your administration are facing. With our industry being a small sliver of California's economy, we hope that by allowing our continued operations we can be another success story in your efforts to manage a deadly public health crisis while ensuring California remains a beacon of global prosperity. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,
The California Indoor Climbing Coalition

Members:



Kristin and Yishai Horowitz - Ascent Ventures / The Pad Climbing, San Luis Obispo



Alice Kao and Wesley Shih - Sender One, 2 locations



Howard Konishi - Top Out Climbing, Santa Clarita



Joaquin Estrada - Far North, Arcata

Paul Farkas

Paul Farkas - Boulderdash,, 3 locations

Renee DeAngelis

Renee DeAngelis - Planet Granite, 5 locations

Gianna Leavers

Brad + Gianna Leavers - Blue Granite, South Lake Tahoe

Grayston Leonard

Grayston Leonard - Long Beach Rising, Long Beach

Ian McIntosh

Ian McIntosh - Mesa Rim, 3 locations

Maurice Cureton

Maurice Cureton - Rock City Climbing, Anaheim

Blaine Eastcott

Blaine Eastcott - Rockreation, 2 locations

David Sacher

Dave Sacher + Nam Phan - Vital Climbing, 3 locations

Thomas Davis and Diane Russell

Tom Davis + Diane Russel - Pacific Edge, Santa Cruz

Gorden Cooley

Gorden Cooley - Vertex Climbing Center, Sonoma



Carlo Traversi - The Boulder Field, Sacramento



Damian Cooksey - Bridges Rock Gym, El Cerrito



Will Russ, Santa Barbara Rock Gym



Jenna Tholcke, Hangar 18, 10 locations



Jeffrey Bowling, Touchstone, 11 locations



Matt Martinez, The Grotto, San Diego