Leisure facilities face £90m a week loss under UK winter Covid-19 lockdown

* **‘Government must protect this sector, before it’s too late’**
* **Support available nowhere near enough, says ukactive**

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The closure of gyms and leisure facilities threatens the nation’s health and wellbeing, says Huw Edwards of ukactive.

The winter lockdown will cost Britain’s gyms, swimming pools and leisure facilities a combined £90m a week in lost revenue, according to new analysis from ukactive, which is calling for urgent government help to protect jobs and keep the sector afloat.

January is a vital month for the leisure industry, with many people renewing gym or pool memberships or committing to a new exercise programme. But with [most sports banned](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jan/04/elite-sport-to-continue-despite-johnson-imposing-covid-lockdown) for another six weeks – and possibly longer – ukactive, which represents more than 4,000 gyms and leisure facilities, said the industry was in deep trouble.

“The government must protect this sector as a priority, before it becomes too late,” the ukactive chief executive, Huw Edwards, said. “January and February represent a vital period for gyms, pools, and leisure facilities to trade but they currently have zero income, unlike other sectors.”

**Britain heading for 'perfect storm' over fitness in winter lockdown, says expert**

Last autumn the government announced a £100m fund across the sector while on Monday the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, revealed [one-off grants of £9,000](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jan/05/rishi-sunak-unveils-46bn-relief-package-for-uk-retail-and-hospitality-sectors) for small businesses would also be made available. But ukactive says that help is nowhere near enough.

“The top-up grants and funding announced by the Chancellor, while welcome, will be no more than a sticking plaster for the financial challenges being faced,” Edwards said. “Both public and private fitness and leisure operators will require additional, tailored financial and regulatory support for their recovery.”

Meanwhile new research from 4Global, which provides data analysis to governments and sporting bodies, has found the November lockdown restrictions on the sports industry cost Britain £29m in terms of social value – a figured based on the sector’s contribution to the reduction, through exercise, of health conditions such as depression, diabetes and breast and colon cancer.

This, said Edwards, showed the closure of gyms, leisure centres and swimming pools during January and February did not only present a “major threat to thousands of facilities and jobs, but also our nation’s health, and resilience to conditions including Covid-19, obesity and some cancers”.

Edwards also pointed to evidence from the first lockdown in England, which showed anxiety levels doubled compared with the 2019 average – with an extra 3.2 million people classed as inactive, undertaking less than 30 minutes of exercise a week, as further evidence for more government support.

The government has also been urged by the Youth Sports Trust to do more to help young people to stay active. Meanwhile the sports scientist Greg Whyte has told the Guardian that Britain is heading for a “perfect storm” in which a reduction in activity levels during the winter lockdown has a disastrous effect on physical and mental health.

Whyte has also called on the government to use the 400,000 people who work in the fitness sector but are on furlough to get the population more active.