

## Declaring Physical Activity as 'Essential' during the COVID-19 Pandemic May not be a Good Measure

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We congratulate the authors on the viewpoint entitled “Should Physical Activity Be Considered Essential During the COVID-19 Pandemic?”,<sup>1</sup> and we are thankful for the opportunity to provide some contributions on this current and relevant topic.

The Brazilian legislation, according to the Decree number 10282 (March 20, 2020), defines essential activities as indispensable services that, if not provided, would endanger the survival, health, and safety of the population. Nevertheless, the subjectivity of the term “essential” cannot be disregarded and may cause diverse interpretations.

There is strong consensus among epidemiologists that, in face of the high transmissibility of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), even among asymptomatic individuals, and absence of a vaccine or specific treatment for COVID-19, social distancing is the most efficient measure to flatten the epidemic curve.<sup>2</sup>

COVID-19; Pandemics; Betacoronavirus; Motor Activity; Exercise; Sports; Social Distancing; Mental Health.

It is true that Brazil, beyond the economic and sanitary crisis caused by COVID-19, also goes through a political crisis, with resignation of two health ministers during the pandemic, and lead of the Ministry of Health under an interim minister for more than 15 days already. Furthermore, there are frequent statements by the Brazilian President minimizing the severity of the pandemic situation and the increasing number of deaths, which has even caused foreign reactions.<sup>4</sup> Public opinion polls, published by the Datafolha Institute, held on May 25- 26, 2020, with 2,069 adult Brazilian from all states of the country, (all had a mobile phone), with a margin of error of 2%, showed that the percentage of people supporting social distancing decreased from 76% in the beginning of April to 65%.

The authors of the viewpoint commented that when both France and the United Kingdom declared more severe restrictive measures admitted the possibility of the practice of physical activity in open spaces. However, the French capital, after evaluating the non-deceleration of the disease, banned the practice of activities in open areas between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. In addition, the epidemiological situation in Brazil today is much worse than when these countries enacted such measures, with a total of 498,440 cases, 33,274 new

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daily cases and more than 1,000 deaths per day, registered on more than three consecutive days.<sup>5</sup> Then, it is needed to consider cultural and epidemiologic differences of these countries in comparison with Brazil, a country of continental dimensions with huge social inequalities, and where part of the population lives in extreme poverty.

It is worth pointing out that, out of the three articles mentioned by the authors, highlighting the importance of being physically active during the COVID-19 pandemic, two articles are points of view and one is a comment, and one of them were published by the same authors of the referred text. The two opinions indicate the importance of the practice of physical activities at home or in open areas, but they also reinforce the need to observe and respect the recommendations of the local sanitary authorities about the use of public spaces.

There is no scientific evidence supporting that the deaths caused by the interruption or lowering of a regular practice of physical activities, even for a short time, could be more harmful than the risk of a massive contamination by SARS-

CoV-2. Other issues must be investigated, such as: does the practice of physical activities on a daily basis do promote immunological benefit against COVID-19? How much time of physical exercise would be necessary? How long would it take to a person lose this supposed benefit?

It is a challenge for governments to determine when the benefits of reduction in cardiovascular risk and improvement in mental health and immune system, promoted by physical activity, overcome the need for strict measures to contain the pandemic.

In our opinion, it is the role of the governments to hold educational campaigns that stimulate and guide the practice of physical activities at home, through a variety of medias, while the restrictive measures are in force. But, to officially decree that physical activities are “essential” activities, seems to be a risky and reckless alternative considering the epidemiological and political contexts in Brazil today. The incentive to the circulation of people in the present sanitary conjuncture can cost lives and lead to the need of a more prolonged time of restrictive measures, or even a lockdown.

## References

1. Pitanga FJG, Beck CC, Pitanga CPS. Should Physical Activity Be Considered Essential During the COVID-19 Pandemic?. *Int. J. Cardiovasc. Sci.* [Internet]. 2020 July [cited 2020 Sep 09]; 33(4): 401-403. Available from: [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S2359-56472020000400401&lng=en](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2359-56472020000400401&lng=en). Epub June 05, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.36660/ijcs.20200072>.
2. Aquino EML, Silveira IH, Pescarini JM, Aquino R, Souza-Filho JA, Grupo de síntese da Rede CoVida. Social distancing measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic: potential impacts and challenges in Brazil. *Cien Saude Colet.* 2020;25(Suppl.1):2423-46.
3. Jang S, Han SH, Rhee J-Y. Cluster of Coronavirus disease associated with fitness dance classes, South Korea.[Editorial]. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 2020;26(8). Available online at: [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/8/20-0633\\_article](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/8/20-0633_article).
4. COVID-19 in Brazil: "So what?"[Editorial]. *Lancet.* 2020; 395(10235):1461.4.
5. Fundação Oswaldo Cruz. (Fiocruz). Monitora Covid-19 in Brazil. [Cited in 2020 May 05] Available at: <https://bigdata-covid19.icict.fiocruz.br/>

### Erratum

On pages 589-590:

Where it read:

"We congratulate the authors on the viewpoint entitled "Should Physical Activity Be Considered Essential During the COVID-19 Pandemic?", and we are thankful for the opportunity to provide some contributions on this current and relevant topic."

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4. COVID-19 in Brazil: "So what?"[Editorial]. *Lancet.* 2020; 395(10235):1461.4.
5. Fundação Oswaldo Cruz. (Fiocruz). Monitora Covid-19 in Brazil. [Cited in 2020 May 05] Available at: <https://bigdata-covid19.icict.fiocruz.br/>

