NEWBURYPORT – After months of conducting classes outside or via videoconference during the pandemic, the doors to YWCA Greater Newburyport’s fitness center opened Tuesday. But visitors to the Market Street facility will notice several alterations and requirements.
At the same time, the YWCA Greater Newburyport staff opened its indoor lap pool and warm water pool and began teaching swimming lessons to children. Again, bathers will have to get used to a different system when getting wet.

The reopenings coincided with Phase 3 of Gov. Charlie Baker’s four-phase plan to restart the state’s economy.

John Feehan, executive director of YWCA Greater Newburyport, said he was excited to offer more ways to improve the emotional and physical well-being of the community after months of challenging restrictions.

“I’m grateful for the staff who have put in such time, effort and thought to design a center where people can exercise safely,” Feehan added.

Anyone entering the fitness center must wear a mask and keep it on while exercising. Treadmills and bicycles are spaced 14 feet apart. Each piece of equipment and all touch surfaces inside the center are disinfected after use. Entry is by appointment only, according to the Health and Wellness Director Ilene Harnch-Grady.

Hours for the fitness center are 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesday through Friday; and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. The center is closed Sundays and Mondays.

Despite the fitness center’s reopening, outdoor fitness classes and sessions will continue after becoming extremely popular when the YWCA began offering them in May, Harnch-Grady said.

“That’s going smashing, people love it,” she said.

Outdoor classes, which include strengthening programs, cardio and spinning, take place not only outside the Market Street complex but outside the YWCA’s Pond Street branch and even Atkinson Common. The city has graciously allowed the use of Atkinson Common through August, Harnch-Grady said.

Swimming lessons for youngsters and access to the main pool for exercise also returned Tuesday, according to Diane Sagaser, the YWCA’s aquatics director.

To ensure bathers maintain social distancing, the ratio between students and instructor is fixed at 3-1. Instructors will remain out of the pool, which means that for the younger pupils, their parents will be in
the water with them.

“We are teaching them to instruct their child,” Sagaser said.

The YWCA teaches swimming to children from 6 months old through high school. As of Thursday, about 50 children were signed up for lessons, a significant drop from the roughly 150 who took lessons last summer.

Classes are staggered to ensure there are fewer people inside the swimming complex, Sagaser added.

Pool use for adults looking to get a little exercise is also staggered. No more than four people are allowed to be in the pool for lap swimming – one per lane. Swimmers must also go in different directions to maintain social distancing.

The YWCA’s warm water pool, popular for those rehabilitating from surgery or suffering from chronic conditions, also has a four-person cap.

“I think people are thrilled to come back,” Sagaser said.

Like the fitness center, the pool and surrounding area are sanitized after use. The same goes for the locker room area, which also has a capped capacity.

Harnch-Grady and Sagaser said the YWCA goes above and beyond state and local regulations to keep visitors safe.

For more information on YWCA Greater Newburyport, and to reserve slots or register for classes, visit: http://ywcanewburyport.org/.

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