

## Returning to In-Person Troop Meetings and Activities Interim COVID-19 Guidance

**Edition date:** 2/10/2021 *This guidance supersedes 10/21/2020 COVID-19 guidance*

**Interim Guidance.** GSUSA has provided COVID-19 safety and health guidance for volunteers, recognizing that the timing of resuming in person troop meetings and activities will vary from state to state and even county to county in certain regions. This guidance is intended to be used in conjunction with Safety Activity Checkpoints and according to Indiana and Michigan State and Local COVID-19 circumstances which remains fluid. This guidance is being provided as of the Edition Date above, during a time when a vaccine has not been made widely available. It is important that you continue to monitor local and federal guidelines and the other resources indicated below such as the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#). GSNI-M may, but is not obligated to, modify this guidance, from time to time, in its sole discretion.

**Re-opening Phases.** GSUSA strongly recommends resuming normal in-person activities only after your state and county have successfully passed its final phase of the re-opening process. COVID-19 risk is fluid and the guidance provided does not supersede more recent government guidance or restrictions. Council staff will be, and volunteers should be, checking regularly for changes that apply to their jurisdictions.

**Volunteer awareness.** As Volunteers, you must acknowledge an understanding that COVID-19 is an extremely contagious virus that spreads easily in the community. Volunteers must take all reasonable precautions to limit potential exposure for girls, themselves and families. GSNI-M will continue to highlight this important message to promote awareness, preparedness, health and community service. It is an important time to be a great Girl Scout and demonstrate Girl Scout values.

**Pre-screening and Symptoms Check.** Prior to in-person troop meetings and activities, all participants should **self-pre-screen** to ensure they are healthy and that they have had not experienced symptoms that are associated with COVID-19 in the previous 72 hours; that they have not knowingly been in contact with someone that has exhibited symptoms or has been confirmed positive with COVID-19; and that they have not been to high risk geographical regions particularly those regions that require a 14-day quarantine period.

GSNI-M has provided a [COVID-19 Informed Consent Form](#) for you to distribute to your members, girls and adult volunteers either electronically or as a paper copy. Keep a completed electronic or paper copy for each Troop member in your Troop documents. This should be provided to all members prior to any Girl Scout function (Troop, Service Unit or Council Led). If attending a Staff-led Council Activity or Event, you must provide acknowledgement that you have a completed copy of this form for each participant, parent and volunteer in attendance. Upon arrival, each member should confirm that they have completed the [COVID-19 Informed Consent Form](#) and attest to being healthy.

A [Self-pre-Screening Questionnaire](#) is also available to distribute to your families. The purpose of this pre-screen questionnaire is to implement and demonstrate this important safety step. If an attendee answers a question “YES” that would indicate a likelihood or a known possibility that they could be a carrier of the virus, they should not attend the gathering. The goal is to keep the meeting safe from contagion and do the best to ensure our girls are educated and healthy, not to make it unnecessarily difficult or uncomfortable for girls to gather safely.

If an individual member(s) or Juliette(s) is/are attending a Staff-led Council Activity, they must bring a copy of their Consent Form and attest to completing the Self-pre-Screening Questionnaire upon arrival.

## Troop Meetings

**Troop Meeting Size.** The current suggested maximum is ten people (eight girls and two unrelated adult volunteers). However, check your local restrictions for small gatherings. If more restrictive than 10 people, follow the local restriction. Restrictions vary greatly from state to state, county to county, and even from town to town--and can frequently change. Similar to any in-person gathering, if Indiana or Michigan allows more than ten to gather, utilize all social distancing practices and follow all preventative guidance (such as face coverings).

For large troops, we encourage volunteers to stay connected with girls while waiting for a safe time for everyone to gather. Large troops are wonderful, so stay together, even if virtual! Some ideas:

- Host virtual troop meetings (see below).
- Gather up in smaller groups (pods)—such as age-level groups, patrols, or groups of girls with a particular badge they'd like to work on. Multiple pods can happen if meeting area is large enough to allow for safety and spatial distancing.

**Large Gatherings.** If your jurisdiction permits larger gatherings, confirm the number of people that are permitted and remind volunteers to allow for proper girl-to-adult ratios. It is strongly recommended to meet outdoors as opposed to indoors, and only when social distancing can be maintained. For more people or large gatherings, when the time is safely appropriate, follow the CDC guidelines: Large Gatherings and Community Events.

Volunteers should get council prior approval before planning any gatherings of more than ten people. Council staff may consider larger group gatherings greater than 10 people after considering the norms in Indiana and Michigan at the county COVID infection rate level. Answers to the following questions will help guide this decision:

- Has a successful final phase of re-opening been completed and been successful for over 14 days?
- Do state and local law permit larger gatherings? How many people permitted?
- Have schools been re-opened for in-person classes?
- Is the event indoors or outdoors? (outdoors is safer than indoors provided social distancing is maintained)
- Can social distancing be maintained?
- Always follow CDC guidance and all GSUSA guidance available in this document pertaining to large in-person gatherings and/or hosting council events.

**Troop Meeting Space.** Outdoor spaces where social distancing can be maintained are strongly recommended for meetings when the weather permits. Volunteers should get advance permission from the property owner or the jurisdiction that provides the location.

For meetings held at public facilities, contact the facility ahead of time and ask:

- Is the space cleaned, and touch surfaces (i.e., tabletops, light switches, chairs, etc.) sanitized, at least daily?
- Who else uses the space (how often, what size is the group)? Is the space cleaned between groups?
- What type of faucets / soap dispensers are available in the restroom (sensory or manual)?

Volunteers need to supplement any practices that are less ideal. For example, if the troop arrives after another user group, they should plan to bring sanitizing wipes to get the space ready for their troop. Another example: if faucets are manual, ask volunteers to take some time to show girls how to shut them off with a paper towel and to use paper towels for doorknobs whenever possible.

Meetings may not be held in fitness centers or gyms because the atmosphere in sports facilities is aerosolizing making them a higher risk for contracting virus. **Troop Meetings may not be held in homes.**

**Backyard Meetings.** For back and front yard meetings, make sure that the grounds are completely safe for children. For example, be careful that pools are fenced or otherwise safely sectioned off. The same goes for any equipment or tools or recreational apparatus that is deemed unsafe for girls such as outdoor trampolines. Make sure that pets are kept separate from the girls meeting space. Ensure that both the troop leader and co-leader can see girls and monitor their whereabouts at all times. Maintain the use of the buddy system for errands or bathroom breaks. If the property is large, ensure that the meetings space is kept distinctly separate from non-members.

### **Troop Meetings at Camps**

Since regular troop meeting spaces may not be available, GSNI-M has opened outdoor spaces as well as indoor spaces for Troops to hold meetings at Camp Logan, Camp McMillen and Camp Soni Springs. All safety guidelines must be carefully adhered to in accordance with CDC, state, local health authorities and as outlined in this document including:

- Re-opening phases and/or subsequent closures
- Restrictions by state and county
- Volunteer Awareness
- Troop meeting Size
- Large Gatherings (*when applicable, over 10 persons*)
- Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation (*enforce social distancing*)
- First Aid Supplies
- Disinfectants and Disinfecting
- Personal Contact
- Face Coverings
- Release & Waiver of Liability

As with all Girl Scout functions, Troop meetings on council premises should abide with Safety Activity Checkpoints in terms of two unrelated adult volunteers, adult-to-girl ratios etc.

Members must attest to very specific COVID-19 related health factors such as being symptom free and having not been in high risk areas or in close contact with a known COVID-19 positive person within 14 days of the event. Troop Leaders must have a paper or electronic copy of the [COVID-19 Consent Form](#) and confirmation of [Self pre-Screen](#) completion for each girl and adult participant. Troops must be prepared to properly disinfect and [clean camp facilities](#).

Especially for troop meetings indoors, taking temperatures prior to attendance may not always be possible – but it is certainly ideal. The [COVID-19 Consent Form](#) and [Self pre-Screen](#) provided is very helpful because it asks the signer to attest to very specific COVID-19 related health factors such as being symptom free and having not been in high risk areas or in close contact with a known COVID-19 positive person within 14 days of the event. Troop leaders and parents must complete these forms when hosting troop meetings or attending activities on council premises.

**Virtual Meetings.** Meeting options may need to be flexible based on the fluid nature of COVID-19 risk. Troops that are able to run online meetings as needed (or wanted) should continue to do so. GSUSA recommends maintaining a virtual to in-person ratio of at least 20/80, which means to maintain virtual troop meetings at least 20% of the time to keep tech skills and virtual meeting habits fresh. Use the Safety Activity Checkpoints for Virtual Meetings, to guide your meeting plans: [Virtual Troop Meetings](#).

Other helpful resources to support volunteers for virtual troop meetings and virtual activities, including the gsZoom page, Getting Started Guide and FAQs, can be found on gsConnect. Visit gsZoom on gsConnect for more information.

## Activities / Programs

**Day trips and activities.** In conjunction with Safety Activity Checkpoints, the guidance for Troop Meetings and Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation in this interim guidance should be used for day trips and special activities. Call ahead to the facility or vendor to confirm that they are following CDC and state health department guidelines. If activity or sporting equipment is being provided, ask the provider if they wipe down equipment in between uses, similar to wipe downs in between uses for equipment at the gym. Make whatever appropriate accommodations that are necessary. For example, bring extra sanitizer or disinfectant wipes if none will be provided for public use at the activity location. Leaders and parents are encouraged to check their local county Health Departments for information regarding their specific areas. Determining whether members should attend meetings or events should focus on the status of the member's county of residence and the county of the activity. For example, if your local meeting takes place in a county with a high COVID-19 infection rate, you should meet virtually. If you live in an area with a high COVID-19 infection rate but have a meeting in a lower COVID-19 infection rate, you should stay home.

**(New) Travel with overnight stay.** The timeframe for resuming travel with overnight stays depends on COVID ratings. Volunteers must follow guidance in Safety Activity Checkpoints. For the foreseeable future, volunteers must seek council prior approval before planning **any** overnight activities and continue to practice the Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation guidance outlined in this document.

Once your state jurisdiction permits travel, GSNI-M will proceed cautiously to integrate overnight travel back into Girl Scout programs. Note: restrictions remain relating to the number of people who can gather, the number of households that can be present in each gathering, or other restrictions that would apply to group travel, as opposed to individual or family travel based on the fluidity of county COVID infection rates.

Although travel plans are often arranged several months in advance, please recognize that the COVID-19 risk will change, and contingencies should be planned ahead of time for re-scheduling, cancelling, or pivoting to a virtual activity. For all planned trips, create a timeline and identify a drop-dead date when decisions must be made about whether or not to move forward with the planned trip, based primarily on the safety of our girls, along with financial commitment deadlines and/or other factors. You should also consider purchasing travel insurance but be sure to read all fine print and ask questions to ensure COVID or pandemic-related cancellation.

Once travel becomes possible again, travel approvals will be considered on a case by case basis, factoring in the risk associated with the specific type of travel being requested. For example, a troop might request to proceed with a camping trip, with girls and parents of separate households traveling separately, and sleeping and cooking in separate areas. For this type of trip, social distancing is possible and masks can be worn at all times other than when eating, and eating is occurring only within the family unit. Discuss travel plans with your Troop Support Specialist.

See the Additional Resources located at the bottom of this document for travel related resources in addition to Safety Activity Checkpoints. Before implementing GSUSA guidance, first and foremost, always verify and stay in compliance with federal, state and local governmental health authority guidance or restrictions.

**Transportation (carpooling).** It is imperative to take all safety precautions when girls are travelling in motor vehicles. If possible, girls from different households should not carpool. Coronavirus transmission risk is high when people are in close proximity, less than six feet apart. The risk increases when people are in a closed in area or indoors for longer than 10 minutes. When transporting girls, always space out the girls to avoid crowding, have girls wear a mask and keep the windows partially open to provide ventilation. Make sure parents are aware ahead of time if girls will be in a car together. Always, for every in-person event, meeting, or transportation arrangement, conduct the pre-screening process to ensure that coronavirus does not touch Girl Scout gatherings.

Individual parent drop-offs and pick-ups are also an option. Public transportation should be avoided.

Remember:

- Girls and adults should wear masks when inside of a motor vehicle
- Keep car window opened, at least partially, to circulate fresh air.
- Consider the personal situation of your girls:
  - Do they live with an immune compromised person that they can put at risk? If so, perhaps make other accommodations for her with her parents.
- Prescreen all passengers
  - Have the families been isolating, and free from contagion? If so, the troop may essentially be a safe bubble.

Again, sustained contact within less than six (6) feet for longer than ten (10) minutes within an enclosed area creates high risk for virus transmission, so be very careful with carpool decisions.

**Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation.** Follow the [resources developed by credible public health sources such as CDC](#) or your local public health department. Share these with girls and your volunteer team. Ensure that they are practiced during meetings and activities. Place signs in the meeting or activity space to remind girls and volunteers to engage in [everyday preventive actions](#) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Signs should include:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue, throw the tissue in the trash, and wash or sanitize your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Wash hands if you do touch.
- Volunteers, girls and parents should be reminded to make sure temperatures are taken prior to group interaction to confirm the individual is not running a fever and temperature is a normal 98.6 degrees.
- Members with fever or temperature higher than 98.6 should skip the in-person gathering until their temperature is normal.

**Personal contact.** Hugs, handshakes, “high-fives,” and even activities like the friendship circle can transmit COVID-19 from person to person. Create a safe way for girls and volunteers to greet and end meetings instead (like tapping elbows). *Note: Use culturally appropriate messages, materials, and resources.*

**Singing.** If you normally close your meetings with a song, make certain girls and adults are all wearing masks. Singing and shouting both project germs farther than talking, ask your girls to either hum their closing song, or sing quietly, and always, of course, with their masks on.

**First Aid Supplies.** Troop first aid supplies should include COVID-19 prevention items including hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol), tissues, disposable facemasks, and disinfectants. Trash baskets or bags

should be supplied for meeting and activity spaces, if not already available. Disposable or no-contact thermometers may be added to supplies if available and not cost-prohibitive.

**First Aid / CPR Training.** Keep skills up to date for any emergency. Watch the website for upcoming trainings.

**Disinfectants and Disinfecting.** [Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces](#) and objects that are frequently touched (i.e., table tops, markers, scissors, etc.). Use a household cleaner, or see the [EPA's list of effective cleaners](#) approved for use against COVID-19. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

**FDA Warning.** The FDA has advised consumers not to use certain hand sanitizers due to unsafe ingredients. The CDC provides an updated list of products that should never be used. Be sure to check [FDA updates on hand sanitizers consumers should not use](#) and stay away from products deemed unsafe.

**(New) Face Coverings (Masks).** All girls and adult volunteers wear masks during in-person gatherings, this is mandatory. Regardless of whether it is state law, girls and volunteers should always wear a mask when they gather in person. Volunteers should remind girls that Girl Scouts wear face coverings, not only to protect themselves but to protect others. Face coverings are a civic responsibility and a sign of caring for the community. Girls can bring their own face coverings. Have disposable masks on hand for those who need them. Volunteers can teach girls [how to handle their face coverings](#) so that the coverings are effective.

Please contact [frontdesk@gsnim.org](mailto:frontdesk@gsnim.org) for guidance on how best to handle exceptions if medical conditions are of concern preventing wearing of masks.

### **Reporting and communicating a positive COVID 19 test**

If you should learn of a COVID-19 positive test result, **do NOT contact the parents or troop members.**

Promptly contact [frontdesk@gsnim.org](mailto:frontdesk@gsnim.org) or 1-800-283-4812 ext. 2 in this situation. A council staff member and **NOT** volunteers, will be responsible for:

- Confirming and tracing the positive tester,
- Contacting the parents of anyone who may have been exposed (or other volunteers),
- Notifying a facility where a troop has met.

Let other volunteers know that council staff, NOT volunteers, will notify parents and others about a positive test result and that the tester's identity is confidential. Remember that girl and volunteer health information is private and strictly confidential and should only be discussed with a council staff member.

*Remember: All health information is private/confidential to be shared only on a need to know basis. There are laws and regulations governing sharing of health data.*

**Food, Dining and Snacks.** Be careful when handling and serving food and have girls be careful with each other when eating. Safety recommendations for food, dining and snacks include:

- Encourage girls to bring their own foods to eat (bag lunch or dinner)
- Encourage girls not to share their food after having touched it, such as a bag of chips.
- Individually wrapped items are recommended.
- If providing snacks, especially if unwrapped, have one person, wearing gloves, hand out items to each person, such as with cupcakes or cookies.
- Use a serving spoon or scoop rather than reaching into a bag or bowl of snacks.
- Use a buffet line only if staffed with a safely protected server with mask and gloves.
- Avoid "serve yourself" buffets.

- Public dining only as permitted in your local jurisdiction.
- If serving family style, have one person, wearing clean gloves, serve everyone on clean plates
- Use disposable plates, forks, napkins, etc. when possible.
- Encourage girls to bring foods they can easily cook themselves (a prepacked foil pack) or hotdog for outdoor cooking.
- Ensure everyone handling food, those serving, girls, adults, wash hands (even if they will be wearing gloves) prior to any food prep or meals, following CDC handwashing guidelines.
- If sharing outdoor cooking utensils (roasting forks), they should be washed and sanitized between each use or bring enough utensils so that each person gets their own.
- Continue recommendation for 6 foot spacing during mealtimes.

**Restrooms.** Be very careful in public restrooms. Most public restrooms will regulate the number of people using the restroom at the same time, depending on the size. If there is no regulator or signage, have volunteers ensure girls take appropriate turns to maintain social distancing and that they wear their masks in the restrooms. It is ideal to have automatic flushers and sensory faucets to wash hands. If these are not available, girls and adults should get in the habit of using tissue or paper towel to open doors and latches, touching as little as possible. If the restroom is large, have girls use every other stall and avoid using stalls with a person in the stall next to them at the same time. Restrooms and toilets are fraught with germs normally, and more so now considering the contagion of coronavirus.

**GSNI-M Guidance on State of Indiana County ratings.** The State of Indiana has a rating system by county of how active COVID-19 spread is within a county. This rating system can be found [here](#) and is updated each Wednesday at noon.

- If a county is red: **No** in-person Girl Scout activities should take place. Virtual activities may continue.
- If a county is Orange: Activities may be virtual or outdoors with social distance and face coverings. **No** indoor activities should take place.
- If a county is in Yellow: Activities may be virtual and outdoors. Indoor meetings limited to 10 people (8 girls, 2 adult volunteers) in a space large enough to maintain safety and social distancing.
- If your school suddenly shuts down due to COVID-19, you should move your meetings to virtual.

Activities within any county should follow this guidance until the county is no longer in that particular color stage as per the State of Indiana.

**GSNI-M Guidance on State of Michigan County ratings.** The State of Michigan Department of Health & Human Services has a rating system by county of how active COVID-19 spread is within a county. [Record of cases](#) is here and is updated daily Monday through Saturday. Safe Start information with restrictions can be found [here](#).

- If a county is in the Risk Level D or E: **No** in-person Girl Scout activities should take place. Virtual activities may continue.
- If a county is in the upper B & C zone: Activities may be virtual or outdoors with social distance and face coverings. **No** indoor activities should take place.
- If a county is in lower B and A Zone: Activities may be virtual, outdoors and indoors limited to 10 (8 girls, 2 adult volunteers) in a space large enough to maintain safety and social distancing.
- If your school suddenly shuts down due to COVID-19, you should move your meetings to virtual.

Next update = Mid-March with updates on vaccinations, stay tuned!