

Returning to In-Person Troop and Service Unit Meetings and Activities Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Volunteers

Edition date: 7/10/20

COVID-19 is an extremely contagious virus that spreads easily in the community. Take all reasonable precautions to limit potential exposure for girls, volunteers, and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to change as infection rates rise and fall in different areas. There may be regional differences or developments since this guidance was published. Continue to follow [local](#) and [national](#) directives.

Exposure to COVID-19 is an inherent risk; any interaction with the general public poses an elevated risk of being exposed to COVID-19. Please note that the CDC advises that older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Each family should evaluate and assess their risk in determining whether or not to participate in Girl Scout activities.

Use these questions and reminders to help decide how and when to return to in-person troop or service unit activities.

- **Leading in-person activities during COVID-19 is optional. Volunteers should first decide if they are comfortable offering in-person GS activities for their troop before proceeding.**
- **Any in-person Girl Scout activity must follow NYS guidelines for Phase Four. All girls and volunteers must practice social distancing, wear face coverings (masks) when indoors and within 6 feet of others, and follow safety guidelines as outlined by the CDC.**
- **Leaders should share these guidelines with troop families, and make a collaborative decision with families based on comfort level, accessibility, and desired level of engagement.**
- **Additionally, volunteers and families should assess their ability to comply with required guidelines. For example, younger girls may find it difficult to remain socially distant and/or wear masks. If girls cannot comply with guidelines, troop activities should remain virtual at this time.**

Meeting Space. Outdoor spaces where social distancing can be maintained are strongly recommended for meetings although indoor spaces can also be used with the following guidelines. 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)?
- Girls and volunteers must come prepared with masks or the troop must provide them.

Then, consider whether you can supplement any practices that are less ideal. For example, if you will arrive after another user group, plan to bring sanitizing wipes to get the space ready for your troop. Another example: if faucets are manual, take some time to show girls how to shut them off with a paper towel. Use paper towels for doorknobs whenever possible.

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Meetings may not be held in fitness centers or gyms, where a greater risk for contracting the virus may exist. Schools or churches might not permit outside groups on premises, so always check and confirm ahead of time. If your previous troop meeting place is no longer available, reach out to your service unit or GSWNY Customer Care to identify other possibilities.

Meeting spaces may request a document outlining the steps your troop will take to be safe. You may share this document to fulfill that request.

Meetings/activities in the home. At this time, GSWNY prohibits Girl Scout troop or service unit meetings or activities to take place in private homes. This prohibition will remain in place until further notice.

Meeting Size. Smaller gatherings are generally considered to be safer, and GSWNY recommends that you limit the size of gatherings as much as possible, for example if you have 10 girls in your troop, limit activities to the 10 girls plus the required number of approved volunteers to fulfill supervision ratios. Based on the most recent NYS requirements [for Phase 4](#), the current maximum gathering size is up to 50 people. However, [check your local restrictions](#) for small gatherings. If more restrictive, follow the local restriction. Utilize all social distancing practices and follow all preventative guidance (such as face coverings).

If you have a troop/service unit larger than 50, stay connected while you wait for a safe time for everyone to gather. Some ideas:

- Host virtual troop or service unit meetings (see below).
- Gather up in smaller groups—such as age-level groups, patrols, or groups of girls with a particular badge they'd like to work on.

Transportation. Individual parents drop off and pick up their own girls from meetings. Carpooling is prohibited. Public transportation should be avoided, where possible, to maintain social distancing.

Virtual meetings. Meeting options may need to be flexible based on the fluid nature of COVID-19 risk. Troops/service units that are able to run online meetings as needed (or wanted) should do so. Use the Safety Activity Checkpoints for Virtual Meetings, to guide your meeting plans: [Virtual Troop Meetings](#).

Other helpful resources can be found here: [Girl Scouting@Home](#)

Day trips and activities. In conjunction with Safety Activity Checkpoints, follow the same guidance as Meetings and Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation guidance in this document. Consult the [NYS Forward website](#) for information on currently allowed activities.

- Call ahead to the facility or vendor to confirm that they are following CDC and state health department guidelines.
- If an activity or sporting equipment is being provided, ask the provider if they wipe down equipment in between uses, similar to equipment at the gym.
- Make whatever appropriate accommodations that are necessary. For example, bring extra sanitizer if none will be provided for public use at the activity location.
- As with troop meetings, individual parents must drop off and pick up their own girls from meetings. Carpooling is prohibited. Public transportation should be avoided when possible to maintain social distancing.

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Travel and overnight stays. Travel and overnight stays are prohibited through August 31, 2020. This date will be reviewed and extended as needed. Troops with existing travel plans may contact GSWNY for assistance.

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 volunteers and 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 100 degrees. Members with fever or temperature higher than 100 should skip the in-person gathering until their temperature is normal.
- Parents and volunteers should consider these screening questions before attending **each** Girl Scout meeting or event:
 - Have you or anyone in your household (person(s) with whom you live) traveled either domestically or internationally over the **past three weeks**? If yes, which location(s) did you visit and which airports did you travel through?
 - [\(Check the NYS website for quarantine requirements for anyone who has recently traveled out of state\)](#)
 - Have you or anyone with whom you live experienced any of the [following symptoms](#) within the **past two weeks**?
 - Have you or anyone with whom you live experienced any of the [following symptoms](#) over the **past 24 hours**?
 - To your knowledge, have you been in close, sustained contact (within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more) with anyone showing any of the [above-referenced symptoms](#), or anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?

Also, volunteers should include these questions in each email confirmation they send to parents for meetings and events.

Personal contact. Hugs, handshakes, “high-fives,” and even activities like the friendship circle or squeeze can transmit COVID-19 from person to person. Refrain from these gestures for the time being. Create a safe way for girls and volunteers to greet and end meetings.

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. Make sure that the trash baskets (or bags) are easily accessible. Disposable or no-contact thermometers may be added to supplies if available and not cost-prohibitive, however, parents should be checking temperatures and allowing their girl(s) to join group activities only when temperatures are normal (the same guidance applies to volunteers).

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First Aid / CPR Training. Keep skills up-to-date for any emergency. Troops must have a volunteer with current First Aid/CPR training to take a field trip.

Disinfectants and Disinfecting. [Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces](#) and objects that are frequently touched (e.g., 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 (concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

Household bleach is effective as a cleaning agent against COVID-19 for up to 24 hours when properly diluted. Check that the bleach is not expired and determine if it can be used on a given surface. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.

To prepare a bleach solution, mix:

- 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or
- 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

See the [CDC's website](#) for more on cleaning and disinfecting community facilities.

Face Coverings. Girls and volunteers must wear face coverings (masks) when participating in in-person events and must also practice social-distancing. Volunteers should remind girls that Girl Scouts wear face coverings (masks) 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.

Reporting and communicating a positive COVID 19 test. In the event of a COVID-19 positive test result, do NOT contact the parents or troop members. Promptly contact your council in this situation. This is important for medical confidentiality compliance. Call Customer Care during business hours at 1.888.837.6410 and the Emergency line after hours at 1-800-882-9268. 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, and
- Alerting the state department of health.

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 be only shared on a need to know basis with a council staff member.

Please note that the above guidelines may change based on New York State Phase Four requirements. Continue to go to our website at: www.gswny.org for the most updated guidance available.

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Thank you for all that you do, and please contact Customer Care if you have any questions: customercare@gswny.org or call 1-888-837-6410. In an emergency, please call 1-800-882-9268.