

GUIDANCE ON SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS

SLOWING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

The virus that causes Coronavirus 2019 Disease (“COVID-19”) is easily transmitted, especially in group settings, and it is essential that the spread of the virus be slowed to protect the ability of public and private health care providers to handle the influx of new patients and safeguard public health and safety. The best advice to slow the spread is for people to self-isolate in their places of residence to the maximum extent feasible.

BENEFITS OF THE OUTDOORS

Access to nature and the outdoors is more critical than ever for our well-being in these unprecedented times. Heading outdoors is a good way to get exercise and relieve stress. The physical and mental health benefits of spending time outdoors are well documented. However, being outdoors does not mean that you are safe. Social distancing guidelines still need to be practiced.

STAY HOME OR STAY LOCAL

SAFER AT HOME

The best advice to slow the spread of COVID-19 is to stay at home. In the counties where stay-at-home orders remain in place, individuals may leave their residences only to perform tasks essential to maintain health and safety or get necessary supplies.

If you have a yard, spend time there outdoors every day. Keep up with yardwork, plant a garden, or keep a journal of the seasonal changes in plants, birds, and wildlife as spring arrives. Keep backyard gatherings to folks who are in your immediate family.

STAY LOCAL

If possible, take a walk around your neighborhood with the people in your family, as long as you can stay six feet away from neighbors and others.

Engaging in outdoor activity, such as walking, hiking or running is a great way to get exercise if social distancing is maintained.

Find a local park or trail that offers enough space for social distancing. Pennsylvania has more than [6,000 local parks that are identified on an interactive map](#). Check before you go, as some municipalities have closed local parks to protect visitors and employees.

There also are more than 12,000 miles of trails in Pennsylvania for activities like hiking and biking, most of which remain accessible during this period. You can find a nearby trail at trails.dcnr.pa.gov.

TIPS FOR HEALTHY LOCAL OUTDOOR RECREATION

- Recreate outdoors with people who live in your household – avoid large group gatherings.
- Spread out – if the parking lot or the trailhead is crowded, find another location or go at a less busy time of day.
- Wear a mask if you will encounter other people.

- Do not use playgrounds. They are risky because of their high-touch nature, and they are not cleaned regularly.
- Follow rules for your safety and don't take unnecessary risks.

STATE PARKS AND FORESTS

State parks and forests are places people seek out for recreation, reflection, and relaxation. Pennsylvania has [121 state parks](#), and [2.2 million acres of state forests](#). Visitors are urged to do their part to make the experience a healthy and enjoyable for others and be prepared for some limited services.

The public can access trails, lakes, forests, roads, and parking areas for activities such as hiking if they are able to keep six feet away from others. Practice social distancing while boating and fishing. There are practices to keep in mind if you visit state parks and forests so that we are protecting one another.

For the most up to date information about what's open and closed as Pennsylvania implements a phased reopening check the interactive [DCNR State Park and Forest Facility Map](#).

KEEPING PUBLIC LANDS SAFE AND CLEAN

Visitors can help keep state parks and forest lands safe and clean by following these practices:

- Avoid crowded parking lots and trailheads – find a different spot.
- Be prepared for limited bathroom facilities in some places.
- Bring a bag and carry out your trash or dispose of it properly.
- Clean up after pets.
- Avoid activities that put you at greater risk of injury, as now is not the best time to end up in the emergency room.

Respect the rules, be careful, and value our protected places.

REMINDER: SOCIAL DISTANCING REQUIREMENTS

To help avoid exposure to COVID-19 and still enjoy the outdoors:

- Maintain at least six feet from other individuals.
- Don't hike or recreate in groups – go with those under the same roof and adhere to social distancing (stay 6 feet apart).
- Take hand sanitizer with you and use it regularly.
- Wear a mask if you will encounter other people.
- Avoid touching your face, eyes, and nose.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or flexed elbow.
- If you are sick, stay home.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date, reliable information, refer to the [Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's website for Responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania](#).

For information about state parks and forests, visit the [Department of Conservation and Natural Resources website](#).

The Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society has established a [Recreation and Parks COVID-19 Resources webpage](#) to help park and recreation providers best serve their constituents and communities. The National Parks and Recreation Association provides [guidance](#) on how professionals and the public can stay safe and healthy while using public parks and trails.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy has [guidelines for hikers](#). The National Park Service has a [public health update](#), has altered operations, and asks people to check with individual locations before visiting.

Updated May 27, 2020