

## COVID-19 Guidance for Girl Scout Volunteers Troop Meetings, Activities/Programs, Health & Safety Practices Edition date: November 19, 2021

*An inherent risk of exposure to COVID-19 exists when people are together in-person. By participating in Girl Scouting, you voluntarily assume all risks related to exposure to COVID-19.*

Girl Scouts' number one priority is the safety and well-being of our members and the families and communities we serve. The Girl Scout Council of the Southern Appalachians follows current federal, state, and local COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions. This includes 3 states and 46 counties. Volunteers should always follow the guidance of their local council and public health.

In addition, troop leaders should always consider the comfort level of their girls and families when making decisions related to troop meetings, activities, and trips. Consider the following:

- Before returning to or continuing in-person meetings, survey families for their comfort level. Even if it is allowed in your area, families may not be comfortable with a full return to in-person activities.
- Regularly check and follow real-time local and national safety directives to make sure you and your troop are compliant with local regulations and federal public health guidance.
- For in-person gatherings, the troop volunteers must maintain a list of all attendees in the event of a need for contact tracing.
- **Reporting COVID-19 positive incidents:** To report a case of COVID-19 in your troop, contact Melissa Berry, Chief Administrative Officer, at (865) 387-1679 immediately. Based on information about the gathering and the dates associated with COVID symptoms and/or positive test(s), staff will contact close contacts if needed. Volunteers should not communicate the exposure to girls and their families until they first speak with council staff for next steps. To protect medical privacy, positive results will be told only to those persons who may have been impacted. The identity of the person with COVID will not be shared.

This document provides COVID-19 health and safety guidance for Girl Scout volunteers. The guidance which follows is separated into three categories:

- [Troop Meetings](#)
- [Activities and Programs](#)
- [Health and Safety Practices](#)

## Troop Meetings

**Troop Meeting Size.** The current indoor suggested maximum persons by Girl Scouts of the United States of America are ten people (eight girls and two unrelated volunteers, one of who is female). 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 a state allows more than ten to gather, utilize all social distancing practices and follow all preventative guidance (such as face coverings).

For large troops, stay connected with girls while waiting for a safe time for everyone to gather. Large troops are wonderful, so we encourage you to stay together. To keep girls engaged when they cannot meet in large groups, consider the following:

- Host virtual troop 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.

**Large Gatherings.** For larger gatherings of 50 persons or more, confirm the number of people that are permitted in a facility during COVID and be mindful of proper girl-to-volunteer ratios. Make sure families are aware of the restrictions of meeting in-person, and what rules are in place to keep everyone safe. For example, if you are limited by how many adults can attend, make sure parents/caregivers know that before they arrive. It is strongly recommended to meet outdoors as opposed to indoors, and only when social distancing can be maintained. Be sure to get council prior approval before planning any gatherings of more than 50 people.

**Troop Meeting/Gathering Spaces.** 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)?
- Does the facility have good air filtration and ventilation?
- What is the troop leader's responsibility after the meeting is over? Always make sure you abide by the rules of the partner/owner/facility whose space you are using.

For everyone's safety, supplement any practices that are less ideal. For example, if your troop arrives after another group, bring sanitizing wipes to get the space ready for your

troop. If faucets are manual, 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 makes them a higher risk for contracting virus.

**Troop Meetings at Home.** GSUSA suggests no meetings in the home out of concern that there would be greater risk of exposure to other family members.

In certain exceptional situations and due to the current COVID-19 risk restricting public meeting options, GSCSA will evaluate in-home meetings on a case-by-case basis, particularly for those troops in rural areas who have regularly and successfully met in the home, have no elderly or immune compromised family members in the home, have been deemed safe beyond a final phase of re-opening and do not have access to a virtual or community-based location option. However, these complexities may be difficult to confirm and manage consistently which is why the recommendation, ideally, is to stay away from in-home meetings.

Contact GSCSA for any extenuating circumstances that might make an at home meeting necessary. If approved, the following guidelines must be followed:

- The home must be the home of registered, background checked, council approved volunteer and, as always, the appropriate girl-volunteer ratio must be met.
- The volunteer must make the GSCSA aware of all non-members (children and adults) who will be present in the home at the time of the meeting.
- Girls may not meet in a home where a registered sex offender lives.
- The troop needs to be able to focus without disruptions from other household members.
- Animals should be kept in a place that is separate from the meeting space.
- Homeowners should consider any personal homeowner insurance implications. The homeowner should ask their homeowner's insurance carrier if there are any insurance exclusions regarding holding troop meetings at the home, in the event an accident or injury occurs.
- Weapons must be completely out of view and stored in a locked space.
- Medication, dangerous cleaning products, or any poisonous substance must be stored in a secure space out of sight, preferably locked.
- Meetings should ideally be held outdoors, perhaps in the back or front yard of the home.
- Hygiene and Risk Mitigation and all other guidance in this document must be followed.

**Backyard Meetings.** For back and front yard meetings, the volunteers make sure that the grounds are completely safe for children. For example, pools must be 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. The homeowner should provide supervision and any necessary safety regulations around the use of backyard playground equipment. Pets must be kept separate from the girls' meeting

space. Volunteers must be able to see girls and monitor their whereabouts at all times. A buddy system should be used for errands or bathroom breaks. If the property is large, ensure that the meeting space is kept distinctly separate from non-members.

**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 and on the ready.

Use the Safety Activity Checkpoints for Virtual Meetings to guide your meeting plans. Contact GSCSA for other helpful resources to support virtual troop meetings and virtual activities, including gsZoom licenses and the Getting Started Guide and FAQs.

## Activities and Programs

**Day trips and activities.** The guidance details here should be used with Safety Activity Checkpoints as volunteers plan any day trips or special activities for troops. Call ahead to the facility or vendor to confirm that they are following CDC and local/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.

**Travel and overnight stay.** The timeframe for resuming travel will vary from state to state and even from county to county in some cases. As always, regardless of COVID-19 restrictions, 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.

**Transportation (car-pooling).** 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 which means less than six feet apart. The risk increases when people are in an enclosed 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.

Remember:

- Girls and adults 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:
  - Does the girl live with an immune compromised person that she 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 a small enclosed area creates high risk for virus transmission, so be very careful with carpool decisions.

CDC guidance for ride shares and drivers for hire may be helpful as an additional reference when evaluating motor vehicle transportation or car-pooling: [Ride Shares and Drivers for Hire](#)

**Public Transportation.** Public transportation should be avoided whenever possible as large groups of people, indoors, for longer than ten minutes are typical of most public transportation and increases transmission risk. Also, maintaining six feet social distance is often difficult or impossible with public transportation.

However, when public transportation cannot be avoided, as long as GSCSA has approved travel by public transportation, follow these guidelines:

- Avoid peak hours.
- Allow extra time to wait and avoid crowded buses or subway cars or capacity restrictions.
- Space out girls to avoid crowding (but keep to the buddy system)
- Consider grade level, age and maturity level of girls.
- Always wear a mask
- Obtain parental or legal guardian permission, make sure they are aware.
- Clean hands before and after public transportation travel.

**Cookie Booths.** For in-person cookie sales, always opt for outside booths whenever possible. Also think about the structure of booths. Consider building in a protective barrier to act as a sneeze guard and help to prevent girls and customers from breathing the same air before it can circulate. Try to create contact-free ways to accept payments, especially cash, while maintaining a safe distance. Also consider operating cookie tables vertically instead of horizontally to ensure a greater distance is kept between girls and customers. Reach tools can be used to hand off cookies to customers. Remember that first aid, personal protective equipment and disinfectant should be in supply and easily accessible.

## Health and Safety Practices

**Vaccinations for girl members and volunteers:** Members are strongly encouraged to vaccinate, but they are not required to do so as part of Girl Scouting.

**Volunteer awareness.** Always remember that COVID-19 is an extremely contagious virus that spreads easily in the community. It is important to take all reasonable precautions to limit potential exposure for girls, volunteers and families. It is an important time to be a safety-minded Girl Scout and demonstrate Girl Scout values.

It is also important to regularly check and follow real-time local and national safety directives and to survey your girls' families for their comfort level with respect to returning to troop meetings.

For every in person gathering, remember:

- Pre-screening and symptoms check questions are asked of each attendee ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html)).
- Girls and adults wear masks indoors and, when crowded, outdoors.
- Outdoors is preferred to indoors, whenever possible.
- Always maintain 6 feet distance between households.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Avoid touching the face.
- Limit sharing of utensils and supplies; disposable items are best.
- Carry disinfectant and make sure girls are using it as appropriate.
- Girls should bring their own snacks and supplies whenever possible.

**Pre-screening and Symptoms Check.** Prior to in-person troop meetings and activities, all participants should be screened to ensure:

- they are healthy and that they have not experienced symptoms that are associated with COVID-19 in the previous 72 hours;
- that they have not knowingly been in contact with someone who has exhibited symptoms or has been confirmed positive with COVID-19 or a person waiting to see if they are positive; and
- that they have not been to high-risk geographical regions particularly those regions that require a 14-day or otherwise specific quarantine period.

Note: The CDC defines “**close contact**” as follows:

- You were within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more cumulative in a 24-hour period.
- You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- You had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them).
- You shared eating or drinking utensils.
- They sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you.

If you are planning an event, you should complete pre-screening and symptoms check for each attendee immediately prior to each in-person gathering. If an attendee answers a question that would indicate a likelihood or a known possibility that they could be a carrier of the virus, they should be asked not to attend the gathering.

Please keep in mind that when adult volunteers and parents are answering these questions, they need to answer them with respect to both their personal lives and their professional occupation.

Due to the fact that girls may be experiencing symptoms that are similar but completely unrelated to COVID-19 and not contagious such as menstrual body aches, headaches, allergies, or a pre-existing condition. The goal is to keep the gathering safe from contagion and do the very best to ensure our girls are educated and healthy, not to make it unnecessarily difficult or uncomfortable for girls to gather safely.

Hygiene guidance you can share with your girls and families as follows:

**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 these areas and other items that may not be sanitized.
- 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 (at or more than 100.4 degrees per CDC). Members with a fever 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, so ask your girls to either hum their closing song or sing quietly, and always with their masks on.

**First Aid Supplies.** Troop first aid supplies should include COVID-19 prevention items including hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol), hydrogen peroxide wipes, 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.

**Disinfectants and Disinfecting.** Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html)) and objects that are frequently touched (i.e., tabletops, markers, scissors, etc.). Use a household disinfectant cleaner or see the EPA's list of effective cleaners ([www.epa.gov/coronavirus/about-list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19-0](http://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/about-list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19-0)) 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.).

See the CDC's website for more on cleaning and disinfecting community facilities. **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 ([www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-updates-hand-sanitizers-consumers-should-not-use](http://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-updates-hand-sanitizers-consumers-should-not-use)) and stay away from products deemed unsafe.

**Face Coverings (Masks).** All girls and adult volunteers wear masks inside or in crowded outdoor settings during in-person gatherings. 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 ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html)) so that the coverings are effective.

Some girls or volunteers may not be able to wear masks, due to medical conditions such as asthma or due to religious considerations. Volunteers should contact GSCSA for guidance on how best to handle these exceptional circumstances.

Based on guidance from the CDC, double masking or filters are recommended and provides the best protection for girls, adults and the community at large. Troops should follow CDC guidance and best practices in relation to double masking, adjusting masks for a proper fit, etc. For additional guidance on CDC guidelines around mask wearing, volunteers should review the information here: Improve How Your Mask Protects You | CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/mask-fit-and-filtration.html>)

**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 or serving food, washes their 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 six (6) foot spacing during meals.

**Restrooms.** Be very careful in public restrooms. Many 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.