



## Guidelines for Returning to In-person Troop/Group Meetings and Activities *Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Volunteers*

Edition Date: October 23, 2020

*This guidance supersedes August 22, 2020 COVID-19 guidelines*

### Updated Sections as of October 23, 2020:

- Added-new section: **Singing**
- Updated section-**Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation section**: specifically adjusted temperature (i.e. *Members with a fever or temperature higher than **100 degrees** should skip the in-person gathering until their temperature is normal* (previously stated 98.6 degrees))

This guidance, which is comprised of recommendations from Girl Scout of the USA (GSUSA), the Girl Scouts of Central Maryland (GSCM) Back to Girl Scout In-person Activities volunteer and staff Advisory Group, the Centers of Disease Control (CDC), and the State of Maryland, is being provided as of the edition date above when a vaccine has not been made readily available. GSCM may modify this guidance, from time to time as circumstances concerning COVID-19 change.

Volunteers should take all precautions to limit potential exposure for girls, themselves and families. In consideration of a return to in-person activities, we remind our members that COVID-19 is an extremely contagious virus that spreads easily in the community; **therefore, we are recommending initial meetings be held virtually and/or in outdoor settings. Meeting options may need to be flexible based on the fluid nature of COVID-19 risk. Troops/Groups that are able to run online meetings as needed (or wanted) should continue to do so.**

Additionally, Girl Scout troops/groups may not meet in homes, be it indoors or outdoors, out of concern that the risk of exposure is too great to Girl Scout members and family members (see Meeting in Homes section below for more details).

At this time, our focus is allowing troops/groups to get back together, therefore, we are not approving large group and service unit gatherings (i.e. programs, events, meetings or trainings).

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. GSCM will continue to follow directives as per local, state, [national](#), and GSUSA.

**Making a Determination to Return to In-person Troop/Group Meetings:** GSCM recognizes that our members and volunteers are at varying levels of readiness in regard to their comfort level in attending and/or facilitating in-person Girl Scouts activities, whether or not they are held indoors or outdoors. Therefore, before a troop or group decides to resume in-person meetings or activities, they need to assess the readiness, preparedness, and comfort level of all troop/group girls, families, and troop volunteers against the *GSCM Troop/Group Return to Girl Scout In-person Activities Readiness Checklist*.

**These guidelines must be provided to all troop/group leadership team members and each Girl Scout's parent/caregiver in advance of holding an in-person meeting.**

**All girls participating in Girl Scout meetings and/or activities must complete and submit the following:**

- [Updated GSCM Parent/Guardian Permission for Girl Scout Activities, Events and Trips](#)
- [Updated Girl and Adult Health Record](#)
- [GSCM Assumption of Risk, Release and Waiver of Liability Relating to Coronavirus/COVID-19](#)

**The troop/group leader needs to retain all these forms with the troop/group records; at any time, GSCM will ask for these forms, in the case of an incident. As per GSCM guidelines, these forms should be retained with troop/group records for three (3) years.**

**Reporting and Communicating a Positive COVID-19 Test:** In the event of a COVID-19 positive test result or confirmed exposure to someone who has tested positive, do NOT contact the parents or troop/group members. Promptly contact Girl Scouts of Central Maryland 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/group has met, and
- Alerting the state department of health.

**Girl Scouts of Central Maryland 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 Girl Scouts of Central Maryland staff member.

**Troop/Group leaders are to document girl and adult meeting attendance for each meeting. This information may be helpful down the road for contact tracing purposes, if necessary. Attendance records for troop/group meetings should be retained for one (1) membership year (October 1-September 30).**

Report a positive COVID-19 test or exposure case to Girl Scouts of Central Maryland at [COVID19Reporting@gscm.org](mailto:COVID19Reporting@gscm.org)

**Troop/Group Meeting Space:** Once again, as COVID-19 is an extremely contagious virus that spreads easily in the community, we highly recommend that initial meetings be held virtually and/or in outdoor settings. If a troop/group makes a decision to meet in-person, outdoor spaces where social distancing can be maintained are strongly recommended for meetings. Obtain 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 are frequently touched surfaces (i.e. tabletops, light switches, chairs, doorknobs, restrooms, 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)?
- Is there adequate meeting space to maintain at a minimum of six (6) feet? Can the space be modified (i.e. rearrange tables, chairs, etc.) if needed to ensure social distancing protocols?

For outdoor meeting locations:

- Consider using new/clean, disposable tablecloths on picnic tables since wooden tables cannot be easily disinfected.
- Consider having girls/families bring their own chairs.
- While outdoors, maintain social distancing and follow current face covering guidelines.
- Have a back-up plan for inclement weather (i.e. rain, thunderstorm, etc.).

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/group. 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. It is recommended that troop/group leaders stagger arrival and drop-off times so that girls/adults are not all arriving/leaving at the same time.

As per GSUSA, meetings may not be held in fitness centers or gyms, where a greater risk for contracting the virus may exist. Schools or churches may not permit outside groups on premises, so always check and confirm ahead of time.

In the case that you are unable to meet at a location the troop/group normally meets, and you are unable to find another, suitable location, please reach out to your Service Unit Manager for assistance and/or Girl Scouts of Central Maryland at [membercare@gscm.org](mailto:membercare@gscm.org) GSCM is working with community organizations, faith based institutions, and business to identify and secure additional meeting venues for troops/groups.

Additionally, GSCM is currently assessing the capability to open some of the GSCM camp units to troops for meetings and family camping. By the end of August, troops who have renewed for next year, will receive a listing of available sites along with specific details and expectations around usage, as well as instructions on how to request usage of camp properties.

**Troop/Group Meetings in the Home:** Girl Scout troops/groups may not meet in homes, be it indoors or outdoors, out of concern that the risk of exposure is too great to Girl Scout members and family members. If a troop/group currently meets in a home, they need to find a new location. If troop/group leaders need assistance, they are advised to contact us at [membercare@gscm.org](mailto:membercare@gscm.org) for guidance and assistance.

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

Troops/Groups may find they are able to have in-person meetings into the fall and then shift to virtual meetings during the colder months. Use the [Virtual Troop Meeting Safety Activity Checkpoint](#) in preparing for virtual meetings. Additionally, visit [www.gscm.org](http://www.gscm.org) for virtual meeting webinars and resources.

**Troop/Group Meeting Size:** In-person gatherings/meetings should not exceed recommended age appropriate troop ratios of individuals, including girls, parents, and volunteers per GSUSA guidelines (see *Volunteer Essentials*). Girl/adult ratio must meet the standard for the program level.

Troop/Group leadership needs to consider space capacity for in-person meetings; can the entire troop/group gather in the meeting location at the same time while maintaining required social distancing practices? Active girl members of the troop/group and troop/group leadership should have priority; minimize additional adults at the meeting. Will parents/caregivers be able to stay at meetings without compromising social distancing requirements and ratio limit guidelines?

If you have a large troop/group, stay connected while you wait for a safe time for everyone to gather. Large troops/groups are wonderful, so stay together! Some ideas:

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

**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 face coverings 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 a 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. Have girls wait outside the restroom, rather than all girls waiting inside a large restroom for use of the facilities. Restrooms and toilets are fraught with germs normally, and more so now considering the contagion of coronavirus.

For outdoor meeting locations that do not have indoor restroom facilities, but rather portable toilets or latrines that have no handwashing station, the troop/group leadership needs to provide hand sanitizer.

**Food, Dining and Snacks:** It is recommended that no food be served at troop/group meetings at this time. Girls are encouraged to eat prior to attending a troop/group meeting. If a snack is deemed necessary, each girl could bring her own snack and drink/water bottle, or if not possible, individually wrapped items are recommended. Girls and troop adults may not share food, drinks, utensils, or plates.

**General Transportation for Troop/Group Meetings, Day Trips and Activities:** Individual parents/caregivers drop-off and pick-up their own girls from meetings. Carpooling and public transportation should be avoided, when possible, to maintain social distancing. Established carpooling arrangements need to be revisited. Troop/Group leaders are discouraged from transporting girls in the troop/group.

**Singing:** Singing and shouting both project germs farther than talking. It is with this in mind, that for the time being, we ask that troops/groups refrain from singing during meetings and activities.

**Day Trips and Activities:** We recommend that individual troops/groups take day trips in-state and do not travel to states listed on the [State of Maryland Out of State Travel and Public Travel Advisory](#). If a troop/group takes a day trip to another state, they need to be aware of quarantine requirements upon returning. **At this time, while day trips are permissible, overnight trips are not permitted.** For individual troop/group day trips, troops/groups still need to follow the State and local COVID-19 guidelines. For out of state trips, please complete the *GSCM Trip Application*, if necessary, also the *GSCM Mid to High Risk Application*.

In conjunction with Safety Activity Checkpoints, follow the same guidance as *Troop/Group Meetings and Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation* guidance in this document. 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 equipment at the gym. Make whatever appropriate accommodations that are necessary. For example, bring extra hand sanitizer if none will be provided for public use at the activity location.

Before engaging in any day trip or activity, check the *GSCM Troop/Group Return to In-person Activities Readiness Checklist*.

- Avoid areas with a high rate of infection (i.e. 'Hot Spots') and states listed on the [State of Maryland Out of State Travel and Public Travel Advisory](#). Before engaging in a day trip or activity, check local area restrictions and infection case rate.
- Avoid large scale/group activities.
- Outdoor and virtual activities are encouraged, when possible.
- When visiting locations, contact the facility or venue to confirm that they are following CDC and local health department guidelines.

**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.

- 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 (or the same time it takes to sing 'Make New Friends' twice), 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. Girls and adults should wash hands upon entering the meeting space. The FDA is warning consumers and health care providers that the agency has seen a sharp increase in hand sanitizer products (see current list [here](#)) which are labeled to contain ethanol (also known as ethyl alcohol), but that have tested positive for methanol contamination. Methanol, or wood alcohol, is a substance that can be toxic when absorbed through the skin or ingested and can be life-threatening when ingested.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Wash hands if you do touch any part of your face.
- 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 a fever or temperature higher than **100 degrees** should skip the in-person gathering until their temperature is normal. While troop/group leaders may take girls' and troop adult volunteers' temperature upon arriving at a troop/group activities, it is not required, and is not recommended. Parents/Caregivers must check their Girl Scout's temperature prior to the meeting and answer the questions below upon arrival to the meeting/activity. When girls arrive ask these questions:
  - Does your Girl Scout currently have a fever or had a fever in the last seven (7) days?
  - During the previous fourteen (14) days, have you and/or your Girl Scout come in contact with anyone who had been exposed or has tested positive for COVID-19?



- Have you recently traveled to a state that is listed on the [State of Maryland Out of State Travel and Public Travel Advisory](#)?
- Is your Girl Scout/you presenting any symptoms of illness?

If the answer is 'yes' to any of the above questions, the Girl Scout is not permitted to participate/stay for the troop/group meeting or activity until they are either cleared by a medical professional, it has been 72 hours since signs or symptoms (without the use of fever reducing medication), or it has been fourteen (14) days since the last date of a confirmed exposure to COVID-19. Reference: [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\) Symptoms of Coronavirus](#).

**Personal Contact:** Hugs, handshakes, "high-fives," "elbow taps" and even activities like the friendship circle or friendship 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 instead. During meetings, all participants must maintain a physical distance of six (6) feet. When seated at tables, it is recommended that participants face one way or sit on one side of the table.

**First Aid Supplies:** Troop/Group first aid supplies should include COVID-19 prevention items including hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol), tissues (consider individually packed tissues or have girls bring their own), disposable face coverings, disposable gloves, 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 for girls. 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 troop/group activities only when their Girl Scout's temperature is normal.

**First Aid / CPR Training:** Keep skills up-to-date for any emergency. Contact Girl Scouts of Central Maryland about alternative methods of training that may be available during this time and/or for any questions about current first-aid/CPR certification extensions.

**Disinfectants and Disinfecting:** Adult volunteers, not girls, are responsible for [routinely cleaning and disinfecting surfaces](#) and objects that are frequently touched (i.e. table tops, markers, scissors, door handles, light switches, etc.). It is recommended that girls have their own supplies for use at the meeting, if possible. In the case where supplies need to be shared, they must be disinfected in-between each use.

Ensure sufficient disinfecting supplies are on-hand for meetings. 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.).

Household bleach (per CDC guidelines use regular, unscented 5%-6% household bleach) is effective 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: (in a well-marked appropriate container)

- 5 tablespoons (1/3<sup>rd</sup> 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:** In accordance with [CDC recommendations](#) and the [State of Maryland mandate](#), face coverings are required to be worn at in-door Girl Scout meetings and activities. For Girl Scout activities held outdoors, face coverings are required whenever it is not possible to maintain a minimum of six (6) feet of distance from individuals who are not members of their household.

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. Some girls or volunteers may not be able to wear masks, due to medical conditions. Contact GSCM for guidance on how best to handle these exceptional circumstances as they arise.

### **Clarification of Terms per Girl Scouts of Central Maryland Guidelines:**

**Social Distancing:** Sustained contact of a minimum of six (6) feet. Remember, within less than six (6) feet for longer than ten (10) minutes creates higher risk for virus transmission.

**Face Covering:** “Face Covering” means a covering that fully covers a person’s nose and mouth, but is not a Medical-Grade Mask. The term “Face Covering” includes, without limitation, scarves and bandanas. See the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) definition and guidelines on cloth face coverings [here](#). Face coverings with vents or holes are not acceptable to wear at Girl Scout meetings and activities.