

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

Edition date: 4/27/21

Thank you to all of our volunteers for your dedication to ensuring safety standards. The safety of our girls, volunteers, members, families, and staff is our #1 priority. Virtual and at-home programming remains the safest way to participate, and there is no requirement to meet in person – any in-person meetings or activities are optional. The guidelines below are for volunteers and members who plan to meet or participate in-person.

Thank you for all you do!

Please see updates in yellow.

Impacts to in-person programs and activities with NYS Phase Four designation.

NYS is following Phase Four strategy which means regions within NY are in the varying phases of reopening.

GSWNY continues to review and assess CDC, NYS and county guidelines and may make changes based on new information.

As of **4/27/2021**, these are the guidelines for GSWNY in-person programs and meetings:

- 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 (6 feet+), wear face coverings (masks), 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.

Girl Scouts strive to always be prepared. If any county is placed in a COVID-19 microcluster by NYS, there may be additional restrictions. If any county is placed into the yellow zone, that county will need to limit group sizes to 25 or less. If any county is placed in the orange zone, that county will need to limit group sizes to 10 or less. If any county is placed in the red zone, that county will need to suspend in-person programming per NYS guidelines. Yellow zone restrictions may be applied across the council, and orange, or red zone restrictions will be handled county by county, and will not be applied across the council, unless NYS advises.

Curbside retail and product program delivery are permitted following COVID-19 safety guidelines in the yellow and orange zone, however there may be additional restrictions in the red zone. Troop leaders and volunteers can arrange in-person cookie delivery and/or contact-less pick up of program supplies with families in the yellow and orange zone, however there may be additional restrictions in the red zone.

We recommend you to be ready for the possibility that a county could be placed into one of these zones in the future depending on COVID-19 rates. GSWNY will also respond to any other changes in federal, state or local guidelines.

If a WNY county is placed in the yellow, orange or red zone, and we need to restrict or suspend in-person programs, GSWNY will notify all members by email, on our social media pages, update our blog, and website.

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As a reminder, GSWNY will give full refunds for any in-person program or property rental for GSWNY events, activities and properties that are cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In-person programs and events can be a wonderful outlet for our girls, however they are always optional. There are many ways to participate in Girl Scouts at home with virtual meetings, badge in a box, and at-home activities. At-home is the safest option. Always follow your own comfort level, and if you participate in person, please follow all safety guidelines to reduce the risk.

Top six items to know when meeting in person to reduce the risk of COVID-19:

1. For in-person Girl Scout activities, masks + social distancing are required at all times (with an exception of eating and drinking when masks may need to be momentarily removed as long as they are social distancing). [More info here.](#)
2. 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. [More info here.](#)
3. Carpooling has been prohibited during the pandemic, but we understand some families may need accommodations made. Carpooling requests may be approved on a case-by-case basis following COVID-19 guidelines– please contact customer care@gswny.org to request approval.
4. Currently, GSWNY troops may travel within New York State and Erie, Warren and Mckean Counties in Pennsylvania. Travel within NYS and Pennsylvania is based on current NYS travel guidelines and may change at any time. [More info here.](#)
5. Due to the risk of COVID-19, all photos must comply with the above guidelines including wearing masks and social distancing. [More info here.](#)

Please note: For in-person Girl Scout activities, masks + social distancing are required at all times (with an exception of eating and drinking when masks may need to be momentarily removed as long as they are social distancing). 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 in-person 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.** There are many ways for girls to participate virtually and at-home. 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 (6 feet and up), wear face coverings (masks), 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.**

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

Edition date: 4/27/21

- **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.**

NY State Travel Advisory – Update:

Domestic travel: Domestic travelers will no longer be required to quarantine after entering New York State from another state or US territory, effective April 1, 2021. While it will no longer be mandated, the State Department of Health still recommends quarantine after domestic travel as an “added precaution”. Quarantine is still mandatory for international travelers. Based on this information, Girl Scout members that travel outside of New York State will not need to quarantine or test upon their return to the state in order to participate in in-person Girl Scout programs.

NYS still requires that all domestic travelers must continue to fill out the traveler health form <https://forms.ny.gov/s3/Welcome-to-New-York-State-Traveler-Health-Form>. Anyone who develops COVID-19 symptoms after traveling must still immediately self-isolate and contact the local public health department or their doctor to report their symptoms and determine if they should get tested for COVID-19.

If you have any additional questions please feel free to contact customercare@gswny.org or you can consult the New York State Department of Health webpage: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory#traveler-health-form>

International Travel: Members who travel internationally must follow the following quarantine and testing guidelines:

1. Quarantine for 10 full days upon return to NY State; or
2. Quarantine for 7 days with a negative COVID-19 test 3-5 days after travel.

These requirements apply to all international travelers whether they were tested before boarding, are recovered from a previous COVID infection, or are fully vaccinated. Guidance on how to quarantine can be found here.

Upon arrival in the U.S., travelers must fill out the NYS Department of Health traveler health form to further prevent the spread of COVID-19.

More details can be found at: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/travel-large-gatherings-and-quarantines>

These updated travel requirements will remain in effect until further notice. GSWNY will continue to monitor the situation and provide additional guidance as necessary. Please direct any questions you may have to Customer Care at customercare@gswny.org.

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. Please note meetings may not be held in fitness centers or gyms because the atmosphere in sports facilities is aerosolizing making them higher risk for contracting the virus.

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?

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

Edition date: 4/27/21

- 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 it well-ventilated, or are you able to open windows?
- 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.

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.

If, due to lack of availability, a troop is using an interim meeting space, that space is NOT considered a field trip and does not require a First Aider or permission slips. To ensure safe usage, troop leaders should consider the following questions in their interim space:

- ✓ Space is compatible with adherence to COVID-19 Guidelines for In-Person Girl Scout Activities
- ✓ If applicable, connect with building management to learn about their cleaning procedures, and supplement procedures as needed to meet guidelines.
- ✓ Space is secure, clean, properly ventilated, heated (or cooled, depending on your location), free from hazards, and have at least two exits that are well marked and fully functional.
- ✓ A member of the troop leadership team must have a cell phone and service, or there must be quick access to a public phone.
- ✓ Troops should have first-aid equipment on hand, including supplies to meet COVID-19 guidelines.

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 100 people indoors and up to 200 people outdoors. 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 the maximum permitted by NYS, 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.

NYS allows for outdoor activities where the total size of attendees are greater than the maximum gathering size, but may have restrictions on total occupancy size, such as outdoor movies, zoos,

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

Edition date: 4/27/21

concerts, etc. Your troop may attend these events, however, in those cases, your troop must stay separate from the larger group, maintaining social distance and following all other guidelines.

Transportation. Carpooling has been prohibited during the pandemic, but we understand some families may need accommodations made. Carpooling requests may be approved on a case-by-case basis following COVID-19 guidelines— please contact customer care@gswny.org to request approval.

Public transportation is permitted, please continue to wear face coverings, social distance, and follow COVID-19 guidelines.

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.
- Carpooling is not prohibited. Public transportation is permitted, please continue to wear face coverings, social distance, and follow COVID-19 guidelines.

Travel and overnight stays. If the families of your troop are in agreement to travel, and understand the inherent risks, overnight camping and travel is allowed with these stipulations:

- Current GSWNY COVID-19 guidelines must be followed. Guidelines can be reviewed in this document.
- Council approval is required for ALL travel and overnight activities by completing the [GSWNY Intent to Travel](#). Please email girl.experience@gswny.org for any assistance. For travel less than 250 miles outside of Council jurisdiction, the Intent to Travel form must be submitted at least one month prior to travel. For travel of more than 250 miles, the Intent to Travel form must be submitted at least three months prior to travel.
- No International travel is allowed at this time.
- Troops are expected to research and plan to meet all safety requirements.
- Girls and parents of separate households must travel separately whenever possible. If the troop would like to carpool, a carpool exemption must be requested. Contact customer care@gswny.org with your request at least 2 weeks prior to your travel dates.
- Continue to practice the Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation guidance for all travel.
- The following measures are to be taken:
- Prior to departure, wellness checks must be made on all travelers including temperature checks and an assessment as to current symptoms of illness or exposure to a positive person during the last three days. If any of the questions on the assessment are answered in the affirmative, that individual may not go on the trip.

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

Edition date: 4/27/21

- Overnight sleeping is only permitted in separate quarters, individually, or with members of the same household. Girls and adults need to be in individual tents or rooms and cannot share quarters with members outside of their own household.
- Masks MUST be worn at all times except when eating and drinking.
- Maintain a 6ft social distance
- Daily health/temperature checks
- Handwashing and hand sanitizing stations must be made available at all times
- GSWNY COVID-19 Waiver of Liability must be signed for all participants [GSWNY COVID-19 Waiver of Liability](#)
- Additional insurance should be purchased for non-members. [Application for Insurance](#)

Advice for a successful trip

Travel plans are often arranged several months in advance and contingencies must 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 final 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.

Consider purchasing travel insurance and read all fine print and ensure COVID or pandemic related cancellation is covered; it is often excluded. Decisions about whether or not to approve troop travel or proceed with planned council-organized travel will be based on all current health and safety guidance available in our jurisdiction as well as for the destination jurisdiction to ensure the safety of girls.

Please note: If an approved troop-organized trip gets cancelled due to COVID, Girl Scouts of Western New York is not responsible for rescheduling or reimbursing funds expensed by the troop or families. GSWNY monitors public health guidance and will continue to make changes to these guidelines if any new restrictions or guidance is issued by authorities.

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 (100 degrees or over). 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 (updated effective April 1, 2021):
 - Have you or anyone in your household (person(s) with whom you live) traveled internationally over the **past two weeks**? If yes, which location(s) did you visit and which airports did you travel through?

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

Edition date: 4/27/21

(Check the NYS website for quarantine requirements for anyone who has recently traveled internationally)

<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/travel-large-gatherings-and-quarantines>

- o Have you or anyone with whom you live experienced any of the following symptoms within the **past two weeks**?
- o Have you or anyone with whom you live experienced any of the following symptoms over the **past 24 hours**?
- o 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).

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. **Face masks must be worn at in-person events to protect the safety of all participants in attendance; attendees must also practice social-distancing (maintaining distance of 6 feet or more).** 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

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

Edition date: 4/27/21

masks on hand for those who need them. Volunteers can teach girls how to handle their face coverings so that the coverings are effective.

Girls and adults who identify a medical exemption can contact customer care@gswny.org to request a reasonable accommodation.

Reporting and communicating a positive COVID 19 test. In the event of a COVID-19 positive test result, contact Girl Scouts of WNY at the contact information below. Due to health confidentiality laws, 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.

Cookie Program: For direct sale guidelines and helpful resources go to <https://www.gswny.org/en/cookies/cookies/for-cookie-sellers/resources-abc.html>.

Media Guidelines: we understand that families and troops want to take photos to document girls' participation in Girl Scouting and that photos are treasured memories, and also can showcase girls' accomplishments.

Due to the risk of COVID-19, all photos must comply with the above guidelines including wearing masks and social distancing. GSWNY reserves the right to refrain from posting any photos that do not align with safety guidelines, and also remove public photos, including photos submitted by troops and families to local media.

Girls can be documented without masks if they are participating at home, or with members of her family. Girls in photos with other non-family members of the troop must be wearing a mask and social distancing in accordance with GSWNY COVID-19 guidelines.

Please see our FAQ's for additional information:

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