

Notchcliff Forest Preschool and Forest Kinder Co-Op

COVID-19: Response and Resources

Our hearts are heavy as we share in the collective loss, grief, and stress brought on by impacts of the coronavirus/COVID-19. We are deeply grateful for your support as we navigate these unprecedented challenges. We look to nature for continued optimism, healing, and renewal as we move through this difficult time.

This document outlines strategies taken by the Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 specifically as they pertain to Notchcliff Nature Programs. The policies set forth are based on guidance from the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Maryland State Health Department, and Maryland Governor Hogan's Roadmap for Reopening. We have also included useful resources for you and your little sweeties such as outdoor activities you can do as a family and tips for self-care.

[Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\): Guidelines for Childcare and Schools](#)

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

[Maryland's Roadmap to Re-Opening](#)

[Maryland State Department of Education](#)

[Maryland Department of Health](#)

[Center for the Developing Child and Harvard University](#)

[Testing sites](#)

POLICIES RELATED TO COVID-19

TUITION & CLASS CANCELLATION

If a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, we will cancel class according to recommendations of local health officials. No tuition will be reimbursed for COVID-related cancellations unless the closure lasts more than two weeks.

Maryland is currently in Phase 2 of reopening. If/when the State of Maryland changes the phase, we will revise our policies and procedures accordingly. If the State of Maryland reverts to Phase 1 or issues more restrictive self-quarantining guidance, we will cancel classes until further notice.

If we are required to close for longer than two consecutive weeks due to a widespread community outbreak of COVID-19, we will offer weekly virtual forest school to help maintain continuity for the children. We will not collect payment for closures that last longer than two weeks, however, we encourage you to stay connected with our weekly virtual forest school. If you can make a weekly donation for virtual forest school, it will help us keep our teachers employed.

If you have already paid tuition and a closure lasts longer than two weeks, we will adjust your remaining balance due when we can reopen.

TRAVEL

We are a small community of families. Despite our best precautions, we cannot control choices families make outside of class time. On July 30, 2020, Governor Hogan issued a public health advisory for out-of-state travel. Per the Maryland Department of Health’s [FAQ document on July 30th](#):

“Under the advisory, Marylanders are strongly advised against traveling to states with positivity rates of 10% or higher. Anyone traveling from these states should get tested and self-quarantine while awaiting results. The public health advisory applies to personal, family, or business travel of any kind.”

If you travel to any states with positivity rates of 10% or higher, please do not bring your child back to class until your family has self-quarantined for two weeks. ([Testing and case counts](#) are available here.) Because travel to high-risk states is a personal choice, we will not refund tuition for days missed due to visits to states on Maryland’s travel ban.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

WE WILL DO THE FOLLOWING TO SAFEGUARD OUR COMMUNITY:

CDC Guidance on Preventative Actions	Specific Strategies and Action Items for Notchcliff Forest Preschool and Forest Kinder Co-Op
Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans (EOPs)	We have reviewed our approach to preventing the spread of illness and created this document to inform those in our learning community. This documentation of our policies is a preventative strategy and a means to communicate how we will implement healthy practices among children and staff.
Wash hands with soap and water	Children and staff will wash hands upon arrival.
	Children and staff will wash hands before eating either with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Sanitizer will only be used when hand washing is not available and under close supervision of teachers.

	<p>Children and staff will wash hands after toileting either with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.</p>
<p>Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces</p>	<p>Staff will clean shared tools (such as hand trowels or mud kitchen items) before class and again between shared use among children as much as possible. We will limit the number of such tools and play props. Children will carry select personal items in their backpacks to cut down on shared tool use (EX. colored pencils or scissors).</p>
<p>Cover cough and sneezes</p>	<p>We will model how to do a “bat cough” by wrapping a “wing” (arm) over your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Children and staff will wash hands or use hand sanitizer after a sneeze or cough.</p>
	<p>Disposable tissues are available for noses. Staff will pack out all trash, including tissues. Children and staff will wash hands or use hand sanitizer after using a tissue.</p>
<p>Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face covering when you have to go out in public</p>	<p>Parents must wear face coverings at drop-off and pick-up times. Teachers must wear face coverings if they are interacting with children within about six feet of children. We have provided clear masks for teachers to ensure facial expressions and smiles are visible to the children. Parent volunteers in the co-op must also wear face coverings and we strongly encourage the use of clear face masks (not face shields or surgical masks).</p> <p>Our forest classroom is not in a public setting, nor is it held indoors, which greatly diminishes the risk of exposure to the coronavirus. However, in light of local, state, and federal guidance, we ask that all children over the age of three (3) wear a clear face covering during forest school. (See CDC guidance on use of face coverings for K-12 and guidance in childcare settings.) We will implement child-friendly reminders (“birds, it’s time to put your beaks on!”) so children are not fearful about face coverings.</p> <p>Every child must attend with a face covering (clear, if possible). In terms of developmental appropriateness, <u>if your child is unable to keep a mask on or has certain conditions that make it difficult to wear a face covering, we will not force them to do so.</u></p>

<p>Require sick children to stay home</p>	<p>Parents must keep children home when they are sick. If a child or immediate family member is sick with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 symptoms, children may not attend.</p> <p>Daily arrival procedures include a Daily Health Check-In (google form) that parents sign to acknowledge their child and immediate family members do not display any symptoms of COVID-19. We will use a contactless thermometer to conduct temperature checks as well.</p> <p>Per the MD Department of Health, a child with a confirmed case of Covid-19 may return if and when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and ● At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared <p>Upon recovery, we will also require written notification from a local health official or physician stating it is safe for that individual to participate in class.</p>
<p>Require sick staff to stay home</p>	<p>Staff must be vigilant about monitoring their own health for potential symptoms. Staff are required to alert fellow teachers and program administrators if or when they start to feel sick. Staff members who are sick are required to stay home. If they are ill with coronavirus-like symptoms, they must be tested for COVID-19 and demonstrate a negative test result to return to work.</p> <p>Daily arrival procedures include a Daily Health Check-In (google form) for teachers to sign to acknowledge they do not display any symptoms of COVID-19.</p>

<p>Establish procedures to ensure children and staff who come to the child care center sick or become sick while at your facility are sent home as soon as possible</p> <p>Keep sick children and staff separation from well children and staff until they can be sent home</p>	<p>If a child exhibits signs of illness, we will physically distance the child in a comfortable “isolation space” as far from others as possible, yet still maintain safe supervision until the parent/guardian can pick up.</p> <p>If a staff member exhibits signs of illness, s/he will leave immediately or quarantine away from the group until a substitute arrives.</p> <p>We maintain a ratio of 2:10 teachers:children, so if one teacher must leave, we are still within Maryland’s suggested class ratio for 3-4 year olds. (1:10 teacher:children). If our ratio temporarily drops to 1:10 due to a sick staff person, we will remain in the forest classroom and forego hiking.</p>
<p>If a sick child has been isolated in your facility, clean and disinfect surfaces in your isolation space after the sick child has gone home.</p>	<p>Staff will immediately clean and disinfect any shared materials or surfaces the ill child used, including the “isolation space”.</p>
<p>Sick staff members should not return to work until they have met the criteria to discontinue home isolation. (CDC link)</p>	<p>If any staff member, or member of their immediate family, tests positive for coronavirus, they are not permitted to return to work until they have met the CDC criteria to discontinue home isolation.</p> <p>We will consult with local health officials immediately if a staff member tests positive for COVID-19. Further communication will follow to the learning community, especially if others may have been exposed.</p>
<p>Be ready to follow CDC guidance on how to disinfect your building or facility if someone is sick</p>	<p>We follow CDC guidance on cleaning and disinfecting as applicable to our unique setting.</p>

<p>What to do if COVID-19 is confirmed in a child or staff member</p>	<p>Close off areas used by the person who is sick.</p> <p>[Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the areas.] We are already outside, which is helpful.</p> <p>Wait up to 24 hours or as long as possible before you clean or disinfect to allow respiratory droplets to settle before cleaning and disinfecting.</p> <p>Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick.</p> <p>If more than 7 days have passed since the person who is sick visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is <i>not</i> necessary.</p> <p>Continue routine cleaning and disinfection.</p> <p>If/when a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, we will communicate with the local health department for further guidance.</p>
<p>If a child or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, we look to our local health department for guidance.</p> <p>Any school in any community might need to implement short-term closure procedures regardless of community spread if an infected person has been in a school building.</p>	<p>All decisions about implementing school-based strategies should be made locally, in collaboration with local health officials who can help determine the level of transmission in the community. Our classes operate as nature programs, not schools, however we will closely adhere to the same recommendations as schools and childcare centers.</p> <p>Information about level of transmission is available in CDC's framework for mitigationpdf icon</p> <p>CDC recommends specific procedures regardless of the level of community spread found here: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-schools.html</p> <p>This includes: coordination with local health officials, dismiss children and staff for 2-5 days, communicate with the learning community, clean and disinfect thoroughly, make decisions about extended closures, and implementing strategies to continue education and related supports for children.</p> <p>We will provide timely communication with families via email should any child or staff member test positive for COVID-19.</p>

<p>Develop plans to cover classes in the event of increased staff absences</p>	<p>If regular staff members need to stay home if they or their family members are sick, we will call in substitutes. If no substitutes are available, we will temporarily reduce our teacher:child ratio and operate on a 1:10 ratio. In this case, we would only meet in the forest classroom.</p>
<p>Recommend that individuals at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions) consult with their medical provider to assess their risk and to determine if they should stay home if there is an outbreak in their community.</p>	<p>Any child or staff member at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 (older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions) should consult with their medical provider to assess their risk of participation in forest preschool.</p> <p>Further, they should seek medical advice to determine if they should stay home if there is an outbreak in their community.</p> <p>We are working with our contacts at Glen Meadows Retirement Community to determine if and when we will continue our programming with residents. More information will be communicated separately with updates.</p>

PARTICIPANTS MUST BRING:

- Appropriately sized face covering (ideally with a clear panel for better visibility of facial expressions)
- Clothing and gear appropriate for rain or shine outdoor play
- Backpack with water canteen, nut-free snack in reusable container(s), nature journal, pouch with writing implements, camping mug, etc. (see confirmation email)

UPON ARRIVAL, CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND STAFF WILL:

- Ideally, the same parent or designated person should drop off and pick up the child every day. If possible, older people such as grandparents or those with serious underlying medical conditions should not pick up children, because they are more at risk for [severe illness from COVID-19](#)
- Parents and staff will complete Daily Health Check-In (google form) before exiting vehicles
- Have temperature taken with a contactless thermometer, results will be recorded daily
- Wear face covering (clear face covering for staff)
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer during sign-in
- Use same cubby hook each day for belongings

WHILE AT FOREST SCHOOL, CHILDREN, PARENTS AND STAFF WILL

- Wear face coverings (ideally clear)
- We will provide a “break away” lanyard for each child so they do not lose their mask

- Wash hands or apply hand sanitizer prior to eating, before and after using restroom, and after sneezing or using a tissue
- Avoid touching your face, nose, and eyes
- Clean and sanitize materials as needed
- Children are not expected to be physically distant at all times
- Teachers will come into close contact with children should they need assistance or comforting by way of gentle hugs, sitting close to one another, helping them with toileting, etc.

AT THE END OF EACH DAY, CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND STAFF WILL

- Parents should clean and sanitize personal items daily such as face covering, water canteen, snack containers, clothes, etc.
- Do daily tick check and bathe
- Clean and sanitize materials as needed
- Wash hands or apply hand sanitizer during sign out

GROUP SIZES

Classes include less than 10 children with 2 adults. We staff two teachers per class, but in some cases a group may have one teacher with one adult volunteer. We will maintain these ratios to ensure ample outdoor supervision and reduce the chances of transmission of illness.

EMERGENCIES

We will take universal precautions in the event of an emergency including administering first aid and calling emergency services if needed.

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES & INFORMATION

[Here is an article](#) written by a pediatrician suggesting children aren't big COVID-19 spreaders.

[This blog post](#) offers more information about international approaches to preventing COVID-19. Tim Gill, the author, is a prominent voice in risky play in forest schools in the UK.

This website features an [Evidence Summary of Paediatric COVID-19 Literature](#).

The CDC shares ideas for [Talking with Children about Coronavirus](#).

These policies will be continuously reviewed and updated as needed. Please feel free to reach out with questions by contacting the director, Monica Wiedel-Lubinski, at director@erafans.org.