

Girl Scouts of Southwest Indiana Back to Troop COVID Recommendations and Guidance

Updated April 1, 2021

This guidance is intended to be used for volunteers in conjunction with Safety Activity Checkpoints and according to Girl Scouts of Southwest Indiana (GSSI) state and local COVID-19 circumstances which remain fluid. It is important that you continue to monitor local and federal guidelines and the other resources indicated below such as the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#). GSSI may, but is not obligated to, modify this guidance, from time to time, in its sole discretion. Please use the following expectations to help guide how and when to return to troop activities.

Reminder: COVID-19 risk is fluid and the guidance provided does not supersede more recent government guidance or restrictions. Since the COVID-19 pandemic continues to change as infection rates rise and fall in different areas, there may be regional differences or developments that occur after this edition is provided.

Awareness: COVID-19 is an extremely contagious virus that spreads easily in the community. Troop leaders and families should thoughtfully discuss if they are ready to meet in person. Caregivers who are not ready to meet should be provided a way to stay connected to the troop and/or the council.

In-person troop meetings are NOT required. Each troop/family should weigh their participation based on their own health concerns and tolerance for risk. Volunteers and families should take all reasonable precautions to limit potential exposure for girls and themselves. It is an important time to be a great Girl Scout and demonstrate Girl Scout values. Members and troops who prefer to continue with virtual meetings and activities may continue to do so.

Troop Meeting Size: Group meeting size should follow all state/county facility and gathering guidelines. You may consider breaking into smaller groups/patrols for activities to control the social distancing for your group. Patrols are a long-standing Girl Scout tradition, and this is the perfect time to use them. Please utilize all social distancing practices and follow all preventative CDC guidance.

Large Gatherings: GSSI may permit larger gatherings, following state/county facility and gathering guidelines. GSSI still strongly recommends meeting outdoors as opposed to indoors, and only when social distancing can be maintained. Always follow CDC guidance and Girl Scout guidance available in this document pertaining to large in-person gatherings and/or events.

Troop Meeting Space: 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, volunteers should 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)?

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Then, work to supplement any practices that are less ideal.

For Example:

- In the case that the troop arrives directly after another user group, they should plan to bring sanitizing wipes to get the space ready for their troop.
- If faucets are manual, ask volunteers to show girls how to shut them off with a paper towel and to use paper towels for doorknobs whenever possible.

Troop Meetings in the Home: Meeting in the home causes concern due to a greater risk of exposure to other family members in the home. In certain exceptional situations and due to the current COVID-19 risk restricting public meeting options, GSSI will evaluate in-home meetings on a case-by-case basis.

GSSI's approval process and considerations will include:

- The home must be the home of a council-approved registered volunteer with a current background check on file.
- Girls may not meet in a home where a registered sex offender lives.
- GSSI requires background checks for all adults living in the home.
- 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 and preferably locked.
- Meetings should ideally be held outdoors, perhaps in the back or front yard of the home (*this is a COVID-19 specific precaution*).
- Ensure that the Hygiene and Risk Mitigation and all other guidance in this document are followed. (*This is a COVID-19 specific precaution.*)

Backyard Meetings For back and front yard meetings, make sure that the grounds are completely safe for children. For example, be careful that pools are 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. Make sure that pets are kept separate from the girls meeting space. Ensure that both the troop leader and co-leader can see girls and monitor their whereabouts at all times. Maintain the use of the buddy system for errands or bathroom breaks. If the property is large, ensure that the meetings space is kept distinctly separate from non-members.

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Transportation Carpooling may resume as necessary with precautions. For example:

- Girls and adults should wear masks when inside of a motor vehicle.
- Keep car windows opened, at least slightly, to circulate fresh air.
- Consider the personal situation of your girls:
 - Do they live with an immunocompromised person that they can put at risk? If so, perhaps make other accommodations for her with her parents.
 - Have the families been isolating, and free from contagion? If so the troop may essentially be a safe bubble.

Remember, sustained contact within less than six (6) feet for longer than fifteen (15) minutes within an enclosed area creates a high risk for virus transmission.

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. Use Safety Activity Checkpoints for Virtual Meetings to guide your meeting plans. See [Virtual Troop Meetings](#).

Day Trips and Activities: Safety Activity Checkpoints, the afore listed guidance for troop meetings, and the *Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation* section in this interim guide should be followed for day trips and special activities. 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 sanitize equipment in between uses, and make the appropriate accommodations necessary. If needed, bring extra sanitizer or disinfectant wipes if none will be provided for public use at the activity location.

Travel and Overnight Stays: Overnight trips are permitted starting May 1, 2021. As always, volunteers must seek council prior-approval before planning any overnight stays, follow guidance in Safety Activity Checkpoints and continue to follow the *Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation* section of this document for the foreseeable future.

Hygiene and COVID-19 Risk Mitigation: Follow the [resources developed by credible public health sources such as the 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.

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- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Wash hands if you do touch these areas.
- Volunteers, girls, and parents should be reminded to take temperatures prior to group interaction to confirm the individual is not running a fever or above a normal 98.6° degrees. Members with fever or temperature higher than 98.6° 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.

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. 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. GSSI offers alternative methods of training, including online. For the time period that in-person training is not available, volunteers can receive online training with a council approved training provider. Some in-person skill training is currently available; see GSSI's website for details.

Disinfectants and Disinfecting: [Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces](#) and objects that are frequently touched (i.e., tabletops, 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 (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).

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:

- 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: 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, but leaders should 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 such as asthma. Contact GSSI for guidance on how best to handle these exceptional circumstances as they arise.

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Vaccinations:

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) strongly encourages, but does not require, vaccination for volunteers. Deciding to receive a vaccine is a personal decision and GSSI encourages our staff and members to respect the privacy of fellow members and their families. While parents/caregivers may certainly ask, volunteers are under no obligation to disclose their personal vaccination status. Also, under no circumstances should a volunteer discuss the personal healthcare decisions of another volunteer with anyone.

Parents/caregivers are certainly free to discuss vaccinations with other parents/caregivers when both parties are open to that conversation. However, parents/caregivers should not feel obligated to share personal medical information if they choose to maintain their privacy in the matter. GSSI encourages parents/caregivers to respect the privacy of the girls and other adults in their girl's troop.

For the protection of all members as well as the families and communities we serve, GSSI will continue to practice, and encourage all members of the council to practice, all CDC-recommended health and safety protocols, regardless of whether or not an individual has received the vaccine.

NOTE: COVID-19 vaccines are not expected to become available for children before the end of 2021. GSSI will stay abreast of state regulations and the protocols that are practiced in public schools and use that information to inform our policies moving forward.

COVID-19 Incident Response.

Reporting and communicating a positive COVID 19 test will be managed by a council staff member. Volunteers do not manage COVID-19 communication responsibilities.

Volunteers should contact council staff at support@girlsouts-gssi.org or 812-421-4970 in the event of a COVID-19 positive test result. Remember: *All health information is private/confidential to be shared only on a need to know basis. There are laws and regulations governing the sharing of health data.*

Council staff, NOT the volunteer, will notify parents and others about a positive test result and that the tester's identity is confidential.

The council staff point person responsible to manage COVID-19 positive tester reports will:

- Record the facts
- Create a file to keep all information related to the incident together, including emails
- Confirm and trace the positive tester
- Notify the facility or homeowner where a troop has met
- Alert the state department of health
- Contact the parents of anyone who may have been exposed, or other adult volunteers

Again, **do not** share the positive tester's identity.

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If an individual arrives and, based on assessment, displays COVID symptoms:

- Place a mask or face covering over the individual and yourself and isolate her away from the group.
- Notify the individual's parent/guardian or emergency contact of the situation and make arrangements for pick up.
- Isolate the individual's belongings and any items she may have touched or come in contact with during the activity.
- Clean and disinfect the area, surfaces, and items that stay with the troop. Have the remaining group members wash hands and clean areas.

The troop leader should notify GSSI at support@girlscouts-gssi.org or call us at (812) 421-4970 to discuss next steps. GSSI will notify the health department and all attendees of the activity without divulging the identity of the affected person if a positive case is identified.

Reminder: Every registered Girl Scout is covered by a basic accident insurance plan. The plan is designed to help supplement medical expenses if an accident occurs during a supervised Girl Scout activity. Girl Scout insurance **does not** cover healthcare or illness.

Release & Waiver of Liability: *New for this year!* A [waiver of liability](#) related to COVID-19 is included with the Annual Permission form, as well as, a COVID checklist for volunteer activity use.

Food, Dining, and Snacks: Safety precautions should be followed when handling and serving food and when girls are 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 server protected with a mask and gloves
- Public dining is allowed 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 wash 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 6-foot spacing during mealtimes

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

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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.