



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

Guidance on Responsible Recreation During the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis

March 28, 2020

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Conservation (State Parks) encourage New Yorkers to recreate locally, practice social distancing, and use common sense to protect themselves and others.

Getting outdoors to walk, jog, hike, ride a bicycle, or visit a park or state lands is a healthy way to stay active, spend time with your immediate household family members, and reduce stress and anxiety while practicing physical distancing. While indoor spaces and restrooms at State Parks and DEC's public facilities are closed to prevent community spread of COVID-19, parks, grounds, forests, and trails are open during daylight hours, seven days a week.

State Parks, Lands, Forests, and facilities are monitored by Park Police, Forest Rangers, Environmental Conservation Police Officers and other staff. These parks, lands, forests, and facilities and visitors will incorporate physical distancing to limit the potential spread of COVID-19. In addition, these officers and staff respond to, and assist, local agencies with search and rescue missions, wildfire suppression, and other response activities. Following this guidance will prevent unnecessary burdens on, and dangers to, state resources and local responders during the ongoing COVID-19 response.

While enjoying outdoor spaces, please continue to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)/State Department of Health (DOH) guidelines for preventing the spread of colds, flu, and COVID-19:

- Stay home if you are sick, or showing or feeling any COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, coughing, and/or troubled breathing;
- Practice social distancing by keeping at least six (6) feet of distance between yourself and others, even when outdoors;
- Avoid close contact, such as shaking hands, hugging, or high-fives;
- Wash hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available; and
- Avoid unnecessary contact with surfaces that are often touched, such as doorknobs and handrails.

DEC and State Parks also encourage visitors to State Parks, State Lands, and other parks to:

- Stay local and keep visits short;
- Visit in small groups limited to immediate household members;
- Maintain distance from others while in places where people tend to congregate, such as parking lots, trailheads, and scenic overlooks;
- Avoid games and activities that require close contact, such as basketball, football, or soccer;
- Avoid playground equipment like slides and swings and other frequently touched surfaces;
- Do not share equipment, such as bicycles, helmets, balls, or Frisbees;
- If you arrive at a park and crowds are forming, choose a different park, a different trail, or return another time/day to visit; and
- If parking lots are full, please do not park along roadsides or other undesignated areas. To protect your safety and that of others, please choose a different area to visit, or return another time or day when parking is available.

If you are sick or have had contact with someone who is sick in the last 14 days:

- Stay home; and
- Spend time in the backyard or other personal outdoor space. Do not visit public outdoor spaces.

If you are over 70 or have a compromised immune system:

- Avoid visiting outdoor public spaces;
- Remain indoors or spend time in the backyard or other personal outdoor space;
- Pre-screen visitors by taking their temperature from a safe social distance; and
- Require visitors to wear masks, if available.

Visitors to the Adirondack and Catskill Parks are reminded to always follow the Hiker Responsibility Code:

- Be prepared for changing weather conditions;
- Carry essentials in a day pack;
- Use current maps/guides to plan their trip;
- Leave trip plans with friends or family;
- Be realistic about fitness and skill level;
- Check the weather forecast;
- Have emergency phone numbers handy (911; DEC Emergency Dispatch: 518-408-5850, in the Adirondacks: 518-891-0235);

- Avoid busy trailheads. Find the trails less traveled and visit when trails are not be as busy during daylight hours;
- Always be safe and sustainable when recreating outdoors. Learn more about how you can protect natural spaces when exploring outdoors by following the seven principles of Leave No Trace; and
- Review additional information available on the DEC website.

For the safety of all visitors and to reduce the community spread of COVID-19, DEC and State Parks are undertaking steps to reduce public density at State Parks, State Lands, and facilities:

- Closing all playgrounds;
- Limiting access to athletic courts and sporting fields;
- Canceling all public programs and events at State Parks, Lands, Forests, and facilities until further notice;
- Closing all indoor visitor facilities, such as nature centers, environmental education centers, visitor centers, and historic houses to the public until further notice;
- Implementing precautionary measures at golf courses at State Parks, including increased intervals between tee times, removing bunker rakes and ball washers, and decreasing use of golf carts;
- DEC is closing access to DEC-controlled fire towers to the public. Trails and the summits to the towers remain open, but the towers themselves present a potential risk with multiple people climbing the stairs, in close quarters, unable to appropriately socially distance, and using the same handrails; and
- Limiting parking. If the parking lot is full, visit a different location to recreate responsibly. For visitor safety and the safety of others, do not park on roadsides and only park in designated parking areas.

Please consult your local park for specific information on any changes to their operations in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.