



REOPENING GUIDANCE PARKS

Reopening parks safely and responsibly is vital for both the well-being of our community. As parks reopen, there are important steps you can take to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in Harris County. This guidance is informed by the CDC and the Governor's order, as well as best practices from other states and associations.

Recommendations Before Reopening

Prior to reopening after extended closure, ensure all parks and facilities are ready to operate and that all equipment is in good condition, according to any applicable maintenance and operations manuals and standard operating procedures

Help Protect Staff

- Identify staff whose duties would allow them to work from home and encourage teleworking when possible.
- Consider offering revised duties to staff who are at higher risk of severe illness with COVID-19.
- Provide staff with up-to-date information about COVID-19 in the local area and park policies on a regular basis.
- Communicate to park staff the importance of practicing healthy hygiene habits, such as washing hands often, covering coughs and sneezes, and social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Recommend and reinforce use of cloth face coverings among staff
- If staff develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, while at work, immediately have them return home from the park as soon as possible. Ask them to follow CDC-recommended steps for persons who are ill with COVID-19 symptoms.
- If a staff member has a confirmed COVID-19 infection, inform other staff about their possible exposure to the virus, while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act; see Public Health

Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure.

- Staff should avoid sharing tools, phones, electronics, and office supplies as much as possible and, where feasible, ensure workers have dedicated workstations for their personal use. Never share PPE.
- Inform staff of where they can get tested for COVID-19.

Help Protect Patrons

- Individuals should avoid being in a group larger than 10 individuals, minimizing in-person contact with others not in the individual's household, maintaining 6 feet of separation from individuals, wearing a face covering or mask, washing or sanitizing hand frequently, and avoiding sharing utensils or other common objects.
- Public should be informed to self-screen before going to a park, beach, or other public open space for any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19.
- Post posters and signs throughout the space to:
 - Remind visitors to socially distance
 - Remind visitors not to gather in groups of larger than 10 people
 - Remind visitors that playgrounds remain closed.
- Provide visual cues to allow for crowd control and appropriate spacing to avoid congregating of individuals in payment or check-in areas
- Monitor areas where people are likely to gather and consider temporary closure to support social distancing practices.

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- Reinforce that medium-to-high contact sports remain closed.
- Use contactless payment and waiver process. Provide hand hygiene supplies, such as alcohol-based hand sanitizers, at payment or check-in terminals.
- If necessary, consider providing physical guides to ensure that people remain at least 6 feet apart while in the park.
- Prohibit parties (a group of 10 or fewer people that arrived at the site together) from congregating in parking lots for periods longer than reasonable to retrieve/return gear and enter/exit vehicles.
- Keep any common areas such as picnic tables not in shelters/structures, day-use shelters, and buildings open to the public arranged so there is at least six (6) feet of physical distance between parties (chairs, benches, tables). Post clear signs to reinforce physical distancing requirements between visitors of different parties.

Modifying Gatherings

- Monitoring areas where people are likely to gather and consider temporary closure to support social distancing practices. These areas might include sports fields, playgrounds, skateparks, basketball courts, tennis courts, and picnic areas. In the event of facility closures, park administrators may place physical barriers in these areas and post signs communicating that the area is closed.
- Posting signs discouraging groups from gathering in larger numbers than are currently recommended or allowed.

Planning for Absenteeism

- Determine how you will operate with a reduced staff if employees cannot work due to illness, staying home to care for sick family members and those who must stay home to watch their children
- Prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies
- Cross-train employees to perform essential functions, so the workplace can operate even if key employees are absent

Free COVID-19 Testing is Available for Everyone

We encourage business owners and employees to get free testing at a testing site. The updated online self-assessment tool is confidential and designed to serve the public in the Greater Houston area. To register for testing, visit <http://covidcheck.hctx.net/>. For those who do not have access to the online tool, call **832-927-7575** to get scheduled for testing. Free testing is available regardless of citizenship status and for those who are uninsured.

Employees should **not** return to work if they are sick. If an employee has a sick family member they live with or has been near an ill person, they should notify their employer immediately.

Please go to www.hcphtx.org for any additional information on how to keep yourself or employees safe during this pandemic.

*People at higher risk for severe illness are those who are 65 or older, especially those with chronic lung disease; moderate to severe asthma; chronic heart disease; severe obesity; diabetes; chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis; liver disease; or weakened immune system.

Additional Information is Available

- [CDC Guidance for COVID-19](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Administrators in Parks & Recreation Facilities](#)
- [The Governor's Report to Open Texas](#)
- [NRPA Slowing the spread of COVID-19](#)

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CHECKLIST FOR MINIMUM RECOMMENDATIONS

Cleaning & Sanitation

- Clean and disinfect the facility in accordance with CDC guidelines.
- Clean and sanitize recreational water equipment before and after use.
- Perform thorough cleaning on all high traffic areas such as guest check-in areas and lobbies, visitor centers, staff break rooms, restrooms, and areas of ingress and egress, including stairways and handrails, throughout the day.
- Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces and items.
- Advise employees to always wear gloves appropriate for the chemicals being used when they are cleaning and disinfecting, and that they may need additional PPE based on the setting and product. Employees should follow the directions on the label of the products. Ensure that cleaning products are stored properly and kept away from the public.

Restrooms

- Ensure that open restrooms are operating with functional toilets.
- Cleaned and disinfected regularly, particularly high-touch surfaces such as faucets, toilets, doorknobs, and light switches.
- Clean, and disinfect restrooms daily or more often if possible using EPA-registered disinfectants that are effective against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Following the Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting to develop, implement, and maintain a plan to perform regular cleanings to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Ensure that restrooms are regularly stocked with supplies for handwashing, including soap and paper towels for drying hands or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and no touch trash cans and that “proper handwashing” signage is placed in each restroom.
- Consider creating a cleaning schedule and checklist posted on the front door so visitors know when to and not to use the restrooms.
- Recommend installing touchless faucets, soap dispensers, and hand dryers, if possible.

Pavilions

- Modify outdoor recreational activities, where necessary, to allow for multiple households to utilize the facility or the equipment while maintaining physical distancing. Such modifications will be specific for each activity and depend on the capacity of the facility.
- When using or renting out pavilions, stager times between uses and encourage persons to only have members of the household.
- Limit the size of gatherings to only 10 people.

Playgrounds

- The targeted use of disinfectants can be done effectively, efficiently, and safely on outdoor hard surfaces and objects frequently touched by multiple people (e.g., handrails, benches); make sure disinfectant has thoroughly dried before allowing children to play.
- Consider including signage informing patrons to:
 - Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet away from people you don't live with.
 - Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
 - Adults and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer: Use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and rub hands together until dry, if soap and water are not readily available.
 - Wear a cloth face covering (if age and health allows).
- Consider adding a hand sanitizer station close to the playground.

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Other considerations

- To the extent possible, outdoor recreation agencies should, but are not required to:
 - Consider closing alternating parking spots to facilitate at least six (6) feet of physical distance between parties.
 - Consider opening loop trails in a one-way direction to minimize close contact between hikers. Designate one-way walking routes to attractions if feasible.
 - Encourage the public to visit parks and recreation areas during off-peak use times as defined and publicized by park or recreation area management.
 - Encourage the public to visit parks and recreation areas close to home.
- Encourage visitors to bring their own food, water bottles and hygiene supplies (including hand sanitizer).
- Position staff to monitor physical distancing requirements, ensure groups are no larger than 10 people, and provide education and encouragement to visitors to support adherence.
- Consider placing clear plastic or glass barriers in front of cashiers or visitor center counters, or in other places where maintaining six (6) feet of physical distance between employees, volunteers and visitors is more difficult.

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