

## *COVID-19 PRINCIPLES AND EMERGING PRACTICES FOR LED OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN CANADA*

*“Please, go outside’: COVID-19 is much less likely to spread outdoors”*

*- Dr. Bonnie Henry (BC Provincial Health Officer)*

This document is the 1st Edition (May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020) and offers guidance for activities and conditions found in the Canadian Led Outdoor Activity (LOA) sector. This is the result of an on-going iterative process which will involve updated editions as information evolves. As these changes occur, it is the user’s responsibility to ensure they remain informed.

### ***Scope:***

This document has been assembled by a collective of outdoor professionals representing organizations and associations connected to the LOA sector as well as health research experts (for more information, refer to the acknowledgements at the end of the document). It provides general principles for managing COVID-19 hazards in the context of delivering LOA in Canada.

Due to the diverse nature of the LOA sector, this document focuses on core or common considerations for COVID-19 hazard management applicable to a broad diversity of contexts. Users should be aware that discipline-specific governing bodies (Association of Canada Mountain Guides, Paddle Canada, etc.) are creating their own set of guidelines and that the principles in this document are intended to be used in conjunction with such guidelines. If you find contradictions between the different discipline-specific guidelines, please visit [www.canadianoutdoorsummit.com](http://www.canadianoutdoorsummit.com) to contact us and inform us of these discrepancies.

For an up-to-date version of this document and discipline-specific guidelines, refer to the Outdoor Council of Canada’s website.

The term “emerging practices” in the title reflects a rapidly evolving understanding of COVID-19 and what we can do to minimize the spread of the virus while providing high-quality LOAs in a societal and political context that is also rapidly evolving.

## ***Who is this document for?***

Led Outdoor Activity refers to any context where one person is responsible for the well-being of another person in a natural environment. This document is for any and all organized programs offering LOA in Canada. The principles found below focus on practical considerations enabling program managers and field staff to best manage the safety of their participants and themselves in relation to COVID-19.

This document is for the use of those who are experienced in developing and implementing outdoor programming with exposure to inherent risk, and, are well versed in outdoor risk management strategies. Furthermore, users of this document are well aware of the logistical implications of delivering programming in the natural environment and can thus convert the general principles below into effective program practices. **Consequently, this document presents general principles and program managers will be responsible for operationalizing them in the context of their organization.**

Upon request, a separate document can be provided to policy makers and other stakeholders that expands on risk management processes in the outdoor sector and how an outdoor program context can and should be adapted to COVID-19.

## ***Land Stewardship and Indigenous Perspectives:***

Any discussion of accessing lands, waters and wilderness of Canada must always take into consideration Indigenous perspectives and voices, which contains over 10,000 years of stewardship and knowledge. Indigenous peoples are intrinsically part of the land as much as the land is part of them. There is no separation; the land is a source of wellness for all and it is incumbent on all of us to be good stewards of it. As Canadians begin to re-access and re-connect with nature, it is important for the LOA sector to have Indigenous perspectives in the forefront of their planning and considerations as respectful settlers of this land known as Canada.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND EMERGING PRACTICES

Outdoor programming operates on the assumption that a degree of acceptable risk is always present for our staff and participants. Within the context of COVID-19, this document has been put together based on the best available evidence of how to reopen outdoor programs with an acceptable level of risk. Each organization is still responsible for developing practices that apply to their specific context.

1. **All outdoor programming should adhere to the following general recommendations associated with reducing the spread of COVID-19, including:**
  - a. **Adhering to all provincial and local restrictions and guidelines pertaining to COVID-19.**
  - b. **Do not accept a participant who is feeling unwell, or under quarantine or isolation order. Do not offer outdoor programming if you are feeling unwell, or under quarantine, or isolation order.**
  - c. **Wash hands frequently, in particular before and after coming into contact with others and communal surfaces.**
  - d. **Ensure sanitizing materials are always available.**

The remaining recommendations should be undertaken with these core principles front of mind:

2. Until further research and specific guidelines are published, outdoor providers should focus their offerings on events involving low-risk terrain and low risk activities (see Appendix A). Hiking and lake canoeing are ideal candidates for such activities as they are easier to adapt to meet COVID-19 guidelines.
  - a. Events involving camping and other complex activities will require more complex strategies and planning but are possible if executed diligently.
3. Guidelines for providers to resume operations:
  - a. Provide COVID-19 prevention training for staff, supervisors, and administration. (as outlined by relevant health authority)
  - b. Develop a vetting process to show that your program is ready to open, and that all staff are ready to return to work having undergone training on how to minimize risk of spread. The process must recognize and follow the recommendations set out by relevant provincial health authorities as it pertains to re-opening criteria and timing.
  - c. Staff or volunteers who are considered to be high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 as outlined by the Government of Canada (i.e. individuals with chronic medical conditions, weakened immune systems, and older adults)

should not be working with participants. Staff or volunteers who live with those considered to be high-risk individuals should also not be working with participants. See the following Government of Canada factsheet for more information: [People who are at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 \(Factsheet\)](#)

#### 4. Operating guidelines for providers:

##### 4.1 Program Planning and Intake

- a. Provide timely and clear expectations to participants and stake-holders (i.e. parents) outlining COVID-19 strategies to create a mutual understanding of the inherent risks and benefits associated with participation.
  - i. For providers without a framework to do such a process, you can refer to the [Risk Benefit Assessment for Outdoor Play: Canadian Toolkit](#) (Gill, T., Power, M., & Brussoni, M, 2019). Use of the framework is optional, providing clear expectations for mutual understanding is not.
- b. Discuss the relevance of using, or not, additional personal protective equipment and record the decision.
- c. Discuss the relevance of daily temperature checks for their specific context and record the decision.
- d. Contact relevant land managers and Indigenous communities to seek input.
- e. Plan to minimize or eliminate group transport.
- f. Inline with directive 1a, screen participants by asking if they have had any COVID-19 like symptoms or have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

##### 4.2 Program Delivery

- a. Outdoor event facilitators should do their best to maintain physical distancing of participants and staff.
  - i. Emerging research suggests that children are at lower risk of contracting, transmitting, and developing serious symptoms from this virus (Tagarro, Epalza, Santos, et al, 2019). Furthermore, with this demographic, constant physical distancing is neither practical nor possible during many outdoor events. Thus, with groups of children, ensuring the safety of facilitators and other adults become key considerations in the management of this risk.
  - ii. Adapt program location and/or timing to relieve overcrowding of high-traffic areas such as boat launches and trailheads.
- b. Inline with directive 1a, group size restrictions will be key, and providers should create small groups consistent with provincial regulations (i.e. pods of approximately 5-10 participants).

- i. Where more than one group operates on one site, they must be isolated from each other. To achieve this, programs may have to run at a diminished capacity.
  - 1. Isolation means multiple pods can be at the same venue at the same time, and each pod must be far enough from the other for physical distancing to be easily maintained. The exact distance will vary based on the ability for each pod to be active contributors to maintaining physical distance.
- ii. This is particularly important for overnight camps; these programs should consider having staff operate as a contained unit throughout the period of operation.
- iii. Some provincial authorities have published more specific outdoor group size recommendations. In such cases, provincial authority supersedes this document.
- c. Assess and monitor team members and participants for COVID-19 symptoms. In symptomatic cases, immediately follow health authority recommendations.
  - i. The government of Canada offers an online COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool, which can be used to accomplish 4.2C <https://ca.thrive.health/covid19/en>
- d. Practice and role-model exemplary personal hygiene.
  - i. Inline with directive 1c, hand washing is of particular importance and should be done as often as possible. Where soap and water is not available, hand sanitizers from authorized distributors should be provided.
- e. Practice and role-model the timely cleaning of surfaces, objects, and equipment.
- f. Prepare for possible closure in case of a positive COVID-19 test within your team or participants.

#### 4.3 Reporting

- a. Operators may be asked to provide data on COVID-19-related occurrences and operational suggestions to assess the effectiveness of the strategies and assist decision making on further steps. This information will inform decisions for the creation, continuation, or lifting of restrictions for the outdoor sector.

## ***Additional Considerations***

### Land Stewardship

- Re-opening the outdoor sector puts outdoor professionals and volunteers back on the land. Environmental stewardship is all of our responsibility and the return of outdoor organizations to open spaces will allow us to once again resume our role in modelling and coaching ethical behaviour and reporting indiscretions.
- Informing land managers (e.g., park supervisor) and obtaining required permits, in advance of entry onto the land, is advisable and demonstrates your intent of being a collaborative steward.

### Indigenous Communities and People

- If travelling through and/or visiting Indigenous communities, it is advised that operators contact community representatives to inform them of your plans and seek permission to enter. Indigenous communities are protecting their knowledge keepers, elders, vulnerable members and their families from COVID-19. Seeking their guidance and counsel is imperative in such cases.

### Transportation

- Contact provincial authorities for guidance regarding transportation planning.
- Consider plans for vehicles sanitization and minimizing contact between drivers and participants.

### Food Service

- Contact provincial health authorities to provide guidelines on safe food handling and preparation.

### Insurance Assessment

- Contact your insurance provider for guidance on reopening, expectations regarding informed consent and other legal documents.
- If possible, request a letter from your insurance company confirming you have implemented their requirements.
- Consider sharing this document with your insurance provider.

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1. Outdoor Council of Canada
2. British Columbia Camping Association
3. Alberta Camping Association
4. Saskatchewan Camping Association
5. Manitoba Camping Association
6. Ontario Camping Association
7. New Brunswick Camping Association
8. Camping Association of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island
9. Paddle Canada
10. Canoe Kayak Quebec
11. Ontario Recreational canoeing and Kayaking Association
12. Sea Kayak Guides Alliance of British Columbia
13. School District 47, British Columbia.
14. Paddle Alberta
15. Outdoor Play Canada
16. Travel Manitoba
17. Tourism HR Canada
18. Hike Nova Scotia
19. Rando Quebec
20. Alberta Hiking Association
21. British Columbia's Federation of Mountain Clubs
22. Canadian Ski Instructor Alliance
23. Canadian Heli Ski Association
24. Canadian Association of Nordic Ski Instructors
25. Take Me Outside
26. Association des scouts du Canada
27. Alberta Council of Environmental Educators
28. Interpretive Guides Association
29. Forest Therapy Guides Association
30. Search And Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada
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8. Birds Canada
9. Cape Breton Regional Municipality
10. CEGEP Heritage College
11. Company of Adventurers
12. Evans Lake Forest Education Society
13. Noojmowin Teg Health Centre
14. Ottawa Riverkeeper
15. East Coast Outfitters
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This first edition is endorsed by:

The Outdoor Council of Canada



## References:

Government of Canada. COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool.  
<https://ca.thrive.health/covid19/en>

Government of Canada. People who are at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19.  
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## Useful Links:

Government of Canada. COVID-19 Outbreak Update.  
[https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html?utm\\_campaign=gc-hc-sc-coronavirus2021-ao-2021-0005-9834796012&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_source=google\\_grant-ads-107802327544&utm\\_content=text-en-434601690164&utm\\_term=covid-19](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html?utm_campaign=gc-hc-sc-coronavirus2021-ao-2021-0005-9834796012&utm_medium=search&utm_source=google_grant-ads-107802327544&utm_content=text-en-434601690164&utm_term=covid-19)

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<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>

Yukon Territorial Government. Current COVID-19 Situation.  
<https://yukon.ca/en/health-and-wellness/covid-19/current-covid-19-situation>

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority. Coronavirus Disease Updates.  
<https://www.nthssa.ca/en/services/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-updates>

Nunavut Territorial Government. Department of Health. COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus).  
<https://www.gov.nu.ca/health/information/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

*“I think we have to take a holistic view of the impact of school closures on kids and our families. I do worry at some point, the accumulated harms from the measures may exceed the harm to the kids from the virus.”*

- (Jennifer Nuzzo, epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health)

## APPENDIX A

The following Matrices are provided as a reference for programs who may not have access to a structured means for assessing terrain and associated risk.

### The Hiking Terrain Matrix

Risk Factor	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Time to additional resources at road or lodge	No more than 3 hrs.	Multiple days, but no more than 8 hrs.	No Limit.
Fall Exposure	Easily managed or avoidable.	Fall hazard exists but manageable with moderate consequence.	Short sections with unavoidable & serious consequence, but can be managed without a rope.
Technical Difficulty	Smooth & Easy. Sections of unstable footing are short & isolated.	Talus and loose footing, some rough sections, trails may be poorly maintained.	Use of hands may be required. May be sustained sections of unstable footing.
Fresh Water	Mid-calf deep for slow moving and ankle deep for fast moving with no downstream hazards.	Hip deep for slow moving and knee for fast moving with no downstream hazards.	Waist deep for slow moving and crotch deep for fast moving.
Tidal Water	Gently sloping and non-slippery intertidal zone. No rogue waves.	Surge channels and tidal entrapment easily avoided. Moderate wave hazard may exist. Moderately sloping. Some slipping hazard.	Surge channels, tidal entrapment and wave hazards may be present. Steeply sloping, rocky, and slippery intertidal zone.
Weather Exposure	Generally sheltered, or easy retreat to sheltered area.	May be exposed but can retreat to sheltered area within 45 minutes.	Exposed areas with difficult or no retreat.
Navigation	On trails, or untracked with natural boundaries and/or handrails, may require simple map.	Simple route choices. May require a map, compass and/or GPS.	Complicated navigation, difficult route finding, requires map and compass

## The Paddling Environment Matrix

Risk Factor	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Distance to Additional Resources	No more than 3 hr.	Multiple days, but no more than 5 hours.	Multiple days, but no more than 12 hours.
Access to Shore	Group can exit to shore easily within 15 minutes.	Group can exit to shore easily within 15 minutes.	Group can exit within 15 minutes. Landing may be difficult.
Ocean Current	Currents less than 2 knots or 4 km/hr.	Currents less than 3 knots or 6 km/hr.	>3 knots, can be complicated by tides
Lake/River Current	Flat water or IRCS class 1 rapids.	IRCS class 2 rapid	IRCS class 3 rapid
Wave Exposure	Waves are less than ½ a meter.	Waves are less than 1 meter.	Rough water: waves, choppy sea, surf.
Wind Exposure and Speed	Shoreline sheltered from wind. Winds less than 11 knots, 20 km/h (gentle breeze).	Shoreline exposed to wind with easy retreat to sheltered area. Winds less than 16 knots, 29 km hr (Moderate breeze)	Shoreline exposed to wind: very few places to find shelter. Winds less than 22 knots, 40 km/h (fresh breeze).
Navigation	Destination is visible and/or shore hand-line can be followed.	Map is required. Lack features along shore can make navigation difficult.	Compass is required or challenging with confusing shore.
Other Boat Traffic	No boats traveling faster than 5 knots or 10 km/hr in the area.	No boats traveling faster than 5 knots or 10 km/hr in the area.	Considerable presence of pleasure boats and/ or commercial vessels
Water Temperature	Above 18°C	Between 12°C and 18°C	Between 8°C and 12°C