



# County of Los Angeles COVID-19 Operational Plan Countywide Trails Reopening Plan May 7, 2020



## INTRODUCTION

There are more than 2,000 public trails located throughout Los Angeles County, which are owned, managed or operated by multiple federal, state and local levels. These public trails are spread across diverse landscapes amid a variety of communities and accommodate a range of user groups such as hikers, bikers, and equestrians. On March 27, 2020, the majority of these trails were closed to the public pursuant to a Health Order issued by the Los Angeles County Public Health Officer (DPH) in response to COVID-19.

On May 9, 2020, DPH will modify its Health Order to allow for the reopening of trails and trailheads as part of a multi-phased approach to allow public access to outdoor recreational facilities throughout Los Angeles County. In preparation of that action, the following plan outlines recommended best practices, rules and regulations which allow for a trail protocol which includes: operational hour limitations, various restrictions, maintenance protocols, monitoring recommendations and other key considerations to guide the trail re-opening phase. These protocols were developed in consultation with the County Public Health Officer and in coordination with federal, state, and local trail managing partners. Adherence to the following plan is critical to safely operate these important facilities so the community can enjoy the emotional and physical benefits provided by hiking and riding on trails.

## SECTION 1: TRAIL USER REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding local outdoor space for recreation and mental respite is important to our physical and mental well-being. In the initial days and weeks following the County's Safer at Home directive, trails and outdoor spaces experienced major spikes in usage as people searched for ways to continue to safely recreate. This surge in trail use and overcrowding of some facilities prompted the need to develop trail use regulations and recommended guidelines to ensure that the spread of COVID-19 is mitigated, while allowing careful and conscientious trail use.

In order to open trails and trailheads for use by the public, it is critical that trail users practice adequate physical distancing and follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) safety guidelines on being active outdoors, as well as the requirements set forth in this plan.

**A. Trail User Requirements** – Trail users are **required** to take the following steps to protect themselves and others from COVID-19:

- 1) Follow all posted regulations at trails and trailhead facilities.
- 2) Do not visit public trails and trailheads if feeling sick, have a fever, cough and/or exhibiting any symptoms of illness.
- 3) Keep six (6) feet of physical distance from others at all times.
- 4) Avoid areas where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- 5) Do not gather in groups or linger at any one location except as needed for brief rests.
- 6) Everyone needs a face covering at the trailhead/parking lots and on any trails where there are other groups of people nearby. Infants and children under the age of 2 should not wear cloth face coverings. Those between the ages of 2 and 8 should use them but under adult supervision to ensure that the child can breathe safely and avoid choking or suffocation. Children with breathing problems should not wear a face covering.
- 7) Pack out all trash.



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**B. Trail User Recommendations** – Trail users are **recommended** to employ the following measures for further protection:

- 1) Upon arrival, assess conditions and determine if physical distancing and required precautions seem feasible. If the ability to implement required trail user safety protocols is questionable for any reason, do not proceed to use the trail.
- 2) Be alert and observant of surroundings while using the trail.
- 3) Understand and follow standard trail use etiquette and safety guidelines, which can be found on <https://trails.lacounty.gov/Prepare>.
- 4) Become familiar with the following trail user passing protocols:
  - a. Provide adequate physical distancing.
  - b. Gain and maintain eye contact.
  - c. Step off trail to allow others to pass as needed and where safely possible.
  - d. Announce your intention before passing to give slower trail users an opportunity to move to a safe location (off trail where possible).
- 5) While biking on trails, maintain safe speeds, utilize bike bells, and slow down and/or stop when passing others to adhere to the passing recommendations listed above.
- 6) Move aside, where safely possible, if standing still for a brief rest along the trail.
- 7) Bring water, hand sanitizer and/or disinfecting wipes to wash or sanitize hands frequently.

## **SECTION 2: TRAIL MANAGER REQUIREMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Recommended Public Communication Protocols**

Given the complex jurisdictional landscape of public trail managers within the County, it is paramount to coordinate public messaging and communications to provide as much clarity for trail users on applicable restrictions and recommended guidelines. The following information outlines the key strategies that are recommended for coordinated communications and effective public messaging of COVID-19 related public safety concerns.

- 1) **Trail Signage** – Signage should be posted at prominent locations at trail entrances that clearly communicate expectations for users while on the trail. Trail signage should be in multi-lingual where appropriate and convey clear targeted visual messaging with an emphasis on visitor’s personal responsibility. If guidelines are not adhered to, repercussions could result in the closure of popular trails.
- 2) **Online & Web Notifications** – Websites, mobile applications, and social media outlets should appropriately note any changes to trail use in a timely manner. On-going collaboration with other trail managers and other trail app managers for consistent transparent messaging.
- 3) **Public messaging** should contain information that is consistent, simply worded, specific, and accurate, conveying the following key messages (beyond the trail user requirements and recommendations already listed above):



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- a. Emphasize trail users' personal responsibility to comply with trail user requirements and recommendations outlined above.
- b. If trail users demonstrate a lack of compliance with the required trail user regulations, trail managers may reinstate closures on the trails and trailheads.
- c. If trails become overcrowded or other COVID-19 related public safety concerns develop, future closures may be necessitated to protect public health and safety.
- d. Visitors are encouraged to follow "Leave No Trace" principles (carry in, carry out) including disposable gloves and masks.

A central repository for communications will be made available on the Trails LA County website, [www.trails.lacounty.gov](http://www.trails.lacounty.gov) (*direct page to be determined*).

#### **B. Required Maintenance Protocols**

While trails generally have limited amenities, the following maintenance protocols are required for staffed trails and trailheads.

- 1) Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be worn by all maintenance personnel.
- 2) Restrooms that are open to the public should be sanitized at minimum of twice daily during operating hours and where feasible, restroom doors are to remain propped open during non-use.
- 3) Staff and volunteers must wash and/or sanitize hands regularly.
- 4) Picnic tables, benches, and/or any other infrastructure that promotes gathering should be temporarily removed, covered and/or cordoned off.

#### **C. Required Monitoring Protocols**

Trail managers shall implement the following monitoring protocols where warranted at high use trails and trailheads to the extent possible:

- 1) Consult with field staff to determine which trails and trailheads are likely to experience the most use and therefore require more stringent monitoring protocols.
- 2) Coordinate with local law enforcement for monitoring and enforcement.
- 3) Train and deploy Safety Ambassadors to support monitoring and reinforce trail user guidelines, utilizing staff and/or volunteers.
- 4) Report non-emergency violations the Department of Public Health Customer Call Center at (888) 700-9995 (M-F 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.) or to the Sheriff's Parks Bureau Dispatch at (800) 834-0064.

While emphasis is placed on the trail users' personal responsibility to comply with the posted requirement, monitoring and enforcement of those restrictions will be vital to achieve a safe and healthy environment for staff and visitors. If trail users are not in compliance with these requirements, trail managers may reinstate closures on the trails and trailheads at their discretion.

In conjunction with local law enforcement, monitors are encouraged to remind visitors that complying with the restrictions set by local, state and federal authorities is the only way to keep the trails safely



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open. Failure to comply may result in penalties enforced by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department or applicable law enforcement agency.

## **D. Other Recommended Operating Protocols**

- 1) **Reduced Hours of Operation** – To reduce crowding, reduced hours of operation and/or weekend closures should be considered at popular trails where carrying capacity and/or staffing for monitoring and enforcement is a concern.
- 2) **Reduced Parking Capacity** – To reduce crowding, reduced vehicular capacity at popular trailheads and staging areas should be considered.