

Guidelines for Paddling at Girl Scouts Nation's Capital Camp Properties During COVID-19

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[View a list of addendums to the guidelines here.](#)

Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to present a set of suggested paddling practices, based on currently available information, while paddling at Girl Scouts Nation's Capital Camp Properties during COVID-19. These suggestions are provided to assist paddling facilitators, and do not replace guidance from federal (e.g., CDC), state, and local authorities. Individual facilitators are responsible for appropriate risk assessment and risk management.

While sanitizing equipment is still required at the end of the session, GSCNC is now emphasizing that troops' main attention during their session be paid to adhering to the behaviors that are proven to be most effective in preventing transmission of COVID-19: social distancing, mask wearing, and hand hygiene

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>). Troops are welcome to sanitize the equipment more frequently than required during their reservation. Please bring your own cleaning supplies.

The troop leader and other adult troop volunteers are primarily responsible for enforcing these guidelines. High adventure facilitators have the right to suspend a session if guidelines are not being enforced properly.

Site-Specific Information about Our Paddling Venues and Rentals

The guidance detailed below is specific to paddling at venues within or adjacent to Girl Scouts Nation's Capital Properties, specifically Camp Coles Trip, Camp White Rock, and Camp Winona, while using GSCNC-owned equipment.

While these guidelines are in place, only one paddling activity will be allowed to be reserved at a time. For example, if a group reserves the kayaks at Camp White Rock from 9 AM to 12 PM, the canoes will not be available for reservation during that time.

There will be a one-hour "rest period" between all rentals. We recommend that this additional time be used as needed for any final cleaning your group needs to complete.

Very limited disinfecting materials will be provided; **groups should bring their own cleaning supplies.**

Access to water/washstands at the ranges can be very limited or nonexistent. As such, all groups should bring plenty of hand sanitizer for their session.

Camp Coles Trip: Venue is the Aquia Creek (Girl Scout Juniors and older). A nautical mile across, this venue allows for ample social distancing while on the water. However, self-rescue (swimming boats to shore) becomes more challenging if not impossible the farther away from shore the group goes. Facilitator should also be mindful that groups don't get too spaced out on the water. There is a stretch of beach as well as a small open area to station boats prior to launch.

Camp White Rock: Venue is the Cacapon River (Girl Scout Juniors and older). The river is fairly narrow and shallow at normal water levels. Self-rescue is very possible, but keeping boats a proper distance from each other could be challenging. The boathouse is located about 250 feet from the river, across a large field which provides ample space prior to launch. There are two put-in locations: the first and closer of the two is a gravel ramp down to the river. The second is a set of stairs slightly upstream and farther away. Both put-ins are relatively narrow.

Camp Winona: Venue is Trefoil Pond (Girl Scout Daisies and older for canoe; Brownies and older for kayak). The pond is large enough for a group to socially distance but will require mindfulness to stay properly distanced during the activity. Self-rescue is very possible. There is a small beach and open area to station boats prior to launch.

General Guidelines

- Maximum group sizes for paddling: follow American Canoe Association and Safety Activity Checkpoint Guidelines.
 - Kayaking: **1 Instructor: 5 participants; 1 Instructor: 10 participants with a qualified assistant.**
 - Canoeing: **1 Instructor: 6 participants; 1 Instructor: 12 participants with a qualified assistant.**

- Facilitators should be familiar with the venue they will be instructing on.
- Age recommendations for paddling: a girl's ability to be independent and allow for a "hands-off" approach that facilitates social distancing during a paddling activity will increase with age and paddling experience. As such, age and experience should be taken into consideration when determining if this is an appropriate time for a group to go paddling.
- **The ability to maintain social distancing in the event of a capsize and subsequent rescue is unlikely if not impossible.** As such, the paddling venue should be well below the group's abilities to minimize the likelihood of a rescue being required. It is the facilitator's responsibility to evaluate the venue and its current conditions to determine whether the group should proceed with the activity. Groups should also consider staying close enough to the shore and/or the docking area to make self-rescues more possible.
- The facilitator must understand and accept the risk involved in performing a rescue even when social distancing is not possible. As the facilitator, the safety of the group is their priority. A facilitator cannot forego their responsibilities even if a situation requires social distancing not be maintained. In other words, if a participant is in imminent danger or distress and the only way for the facilitator to assist them is by coming within 6 feet or even coming into contact with them, the facilitator must do so. If a facilitator does not feel comfortable with or is not willing to accept this responsibility, they should refrain from taking groups paddling at this time.
- Facilitators should also be confident in their ability to give effective verbal explanations to and visual assessments of participants. If a facilitator is not confident in their ability to effectively communicate with/assess participants while social distancing, we do not recommend that they facilitate for groups at this time.
- For various actions detailed below where participants may require additional assistance, consider pairing individuals who have already been in proximity with each other, such as family members, girls who shared the same sleeping structure, etc.
- For canoes, consider pairing individuals who have already been in proximity with each other, such as family members, girls who shared the same sleeping unit, etc.
- Tandem Kayaks may only be used by people from the same household (e.g. siblings, a mother and daughter, etc.).

Pre-Activity

- All **attendees** must have completed the [COVID-19 Health Pre-Screen Form](#).
 - This includes any adult chaperones and tagalongs that may be present.
- Thoroughly review and discuss the guidelines found within this document as well as local, state, and federal guidelines. Make sure those attending understand and are prepared to follow all recommendations.
- Facilitator must acknowledge that they are prepared to rescue any member of the group even if social distancing is not possible during the rescue.

- Facilitator and group must acknowledge and be willing to complete the additional work involved with paddling during COVID-19, including but not limited to the cleaning of all gear.
- Discuss the communication methods your group will use while on the water.

On-Land

- Everyone washes their hands or uses hand sanitizer (performs hand hygiene) prior to the activity.
- All individuals should wear personal protective equipment (PPE) including a face covering over the mouth and nose.
- All individuals should practice social distancing to the most extent possible.
- Add discussion about social distancing while on the water to your normal safety talk.
- Mention minimizing the likelihood of rescues and how to not capsize (don't stand up, keep low center of gravity, don't lean too far in either direction, etc.).
- **Every person is assigned their own boat, paddle, and PFD.** Nobody else uses/touches another's paddle or PFD during the activity. Minimize the amount of contact people have with others' boats (see below).
- All girls should grab their own PFD and paddle. Have girls get their gear one at a time. The facilitator can be present (but still social distancing) to assist in selecting the proper gear for each individual.
 - Visually inspect all gear prior to assigning it to girls to minimize chance of a participant taking ill-fitting or broken gear. If a participant must be assigned a new piece of gear, the gear being replaced should be cleaned/treated as if it had been used during the activity.
- Consider having participants follow along with you during your PFD-fitting demonstration. Depending on group size, consider demonstrating more than once. Perform a visual check of all PFDs after demonstration.
 - If an individual requires assistance fitting their PFD, ensure both parties are wearing PPE and consider wearing gloves for the interaction.
- **Removing Boats from the racks:** paddlecraft are heavy and can be cumbersome, especially for smaller girls. The following options can be used to minimize risk and maximize social distancing.
 - *Option A (kayak only):* Girls pull their own boats off the rack (only if they can do so safely without risk of injuring themselves or damaging the boat).
 - *Option B (kayak or canoe):* Facilitator(s) pulls all boats off the rack. Facilitator(s) uses hand hygiene before pulling each boat. Alternatively (or additionally), touch points are cleaned before others touch the boats.
 - *Option C (kayak or canoe):* Two people work together to pull their boat(s) (stay at either end to maintain social distancing). PPE is worn at all times. Hand hygiene is used before and after pulling each new boat. Alternatively (or additionally), touch points are cleaned after each boat is pulled.

- Canoes may require more than 2 girls to carry. Spread the girls out as much as possible while they are carrying.
- Consider grouping participants into teams to help each other with pulling their boats (e.g. Juliette and Daisy help pull and carry each other's kayaks as a pair).
 - Once off the rack, boats are either spaced 6 feet apart or only pulled a few at a time.
- If desired, high touch areas of the boats can be cleaned/disinfected.
 - For both: handles
 - For kayaks: cockpit rim
 - For canoes: gunwales (especially front and back handles), thwart
- For kayaks: try to have girls adjust their own footpegs or just not use them.
- Ensure paddling conditions are still well below the ability of the group → decide if you can proceed with the activity.

Launch

- Launch should be conducted in a way that maintains social distancing as much as possible.
- Everyone performs hand hygiene prior to launching, especially if assistance is needed.
- Wearing medical or improvised cloth masks could pose a hazard in the event of a capsize.
- **It is recommended that paddlers wear an improvised mask such as a neck gaiter as an alternative while on the water.** Neck gaiters can be worn around the neck and can be easily pulled up if social distancing cannot be maintained. Paddlers could also consider bringing an extra gaiter if they have one to keep in a plastic bag in the event the one they are wearing becomes wet. It is not known what level of protection, if any, an improvised face mask provides once wet.
- Girls should launch their own boats if possible. This may require them to push their boats far enough in the water to float once a participant enters, meaning their feet and lower legs will likely be submerged.
 - Facilitator should give a demonstration of methods of entry into the boat that do not require additional assistance.
 - Some girls have a very hard time launching themselves into the water. If they require a push, limit the amount of time you are within six feet of a paddler. Avoid being face-to-face with a paddler in this situation if possible. The paddler should be wearing some sort of PPE while they are being assisted.
- A qualified adult should enter the water first to supervise launched girls and allow them to move away from the launching area.
 - If there is only the facilitator and no additional qualified adult, girls should stay partially docked (while still socially distancing) until the facilitator is in the water. Girls should be able to push themselves off the bank/beach without help in this situation.

Underway (on the water)

- Continuously reevaluate the ability of the group in current paddling conditions. Modify plans or terminate the event as needed.
- Boats should continue to social distance from each other, and individuals should avoid being directly downwind of another person.
- All participants should remain within sight of the facilitator. Preferably, they would also remain in earshot.
- Ideally, there would be hand sanitizer in each boat. Participants should perform hand hygiene when needed, especially if there has been interpersonal contact. Regular handwashing soap should not be used in the water, and even soaps labeled as “biodegradable” are discouraged.
- Improvised PPE such as a neck gaiter should be worn over the mouth and nose or around the neck where it can be easily pulled up.
- Participants should avoid splashing each other (intentionally or unintentionally) to avoid getting improvised PPE wet.
- Individuals should not switch places in a canoe unless can be done on land.

Landing

- All paddlers perform hand hygiene prior to landing – especially if assistance may be needed.
- PPE should be worn for the duration of landing as well as once an individual is on land.
- Social distancing should continue.
- Girls should dock and remove their boats from the water on their own if possible.
- Participants should switch back to their masks once back on land.

Cleanup

- Boats
 - High touch areas of the boats should be cleaned/disinfected (handles, cockpit rim/gunwales, and additional areas as desired).
 - Cleaning wipes or rubbing alcohol solutions can be used to wipe down boats.
- Re-racking boats
 - Re-racking boats can be even more challenging than taking them off the rack and will likely be a two-person job.
 - Individuals racking the boats should perform hand-hygiene.
 - PPE should be worn during the re-racking process
 - Individuals should maintain social distancing (staying at either end of the boat) as much as possible during the process.
 - Individuals should perform hand hygiene between boats and after finishing.
- Prior to sanitizing the rest of the equipment, perform proper hand hygiene.

- Paddles
 - Each individual sanitizes their own paddle and puts it away one at a time.
 - Cleaning wipes or rubbing alcohol solutions can be used to wipe down paddles.
- PFDs
 - DO NOT use bleach-based products or strong chemicals on PFDs.
 - *Best practice:* PFDs would be rinsed in warm water with mild detergent.
 - HOWEVER we acknowledge that there is limited access to warm water at our camps as well as limited access to any water or drainage system at our waterfront/paddling areas.
 - *Recommended practice:* Spray high-touch areas of the PFD (buckles, straps, chest/shoulder area) with 60-90% alcohol solution. **Allow PFDs to dry completely before putting them away.**
 - Spray bottles with alcohol will be provided for use on PFDs only. However, we still recommend you bring your own as supplies are very limited.
 - We recommend beginning the PFD cleaning process first thing after landing prior to putting away or cleaning any other gear to provide more time for drying.
 - Council has created the following system for troops to indicate when they used PFDs so that future troops can identify the PFDs that have had the longest “rest period” prior to use.
 - At each boathouse there will be a series of whiteboards tied to hangers. The group should write the date they used the PFDs on, and hang the whiteboard up **in front of** the PFDs they used during their session.
 - There will also be hangers available to place **in back of** the used PFDs to indicate where the grouping ends.
 - To make this process easier for future troops, try to hang up PFDs organized by size.
- All locks/doorknobs/handles should be disinfected once everything is put away.
- Everyone should wash their hands or use hand sanitizer once finished.

Unplanned Rescue

- In the event of a capsized, it may be difficult or impossible to maintain social distancing.
- Preferably, the capsized individual(s) can be talked through a self-rescue, which involves swimming their boat to shore, emptying it, and returning to the water.
- If a self-rescue is not possible:
 - Have all individuals involved in the rescue sanitize their hands to the best of their ability (if time permits).
 - Assume the capsized individual(s) cannot wear PPE (specifically a face covering).
 - Be sure that all individuals assisting in the rescue (except for the capsized individuals) are wearing PPE.

- Attempt to maintain the most amount of distance between people during the rescue as possible. However, do not sacrifice efficiency/speed of rescue to maintain social distancing if the rescue is time-sensitive or if any individual is in imminent danger or distress.
- Try to talk the individual(s) though reentering the boat on their own. For a capsized canoe, this may not be possible. If stabilizing the boat, stay as far away from other individuals as possible. Consider using a throw rope as a tool to help the capsized individuals pull themselves up with. **Never use a throw rope to tie objects or people together.**
- All individuals involved in the rescue should sanitize their hands once finished.
- If extra PPE is available, provide the capsized individual(s) with a replacement if theirs became wet.

Some of the language used and many of the recommendations included in this document were adapted from the following resource: <http://www.paddlesafely.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Paddlesports-During-the-Age-of-COVID-19-Risk-Assessment-and-Risk-Management-Ver-23-May-22-2020.pdf>

The aforementioned resource provides the following statement:

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