



## MTR COURSE DELIVERY GUIDELINES FOR THE PANDEMIC ERA 19 July 2020



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The following guidelines for MTR courses are suggestions from the MTR Program Committee, made in the interest of safety in the delivery of MTR courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. These recommendations may change as the pandemic and medical knowledge evolve. Please check the MTR instructor resources on NSP's website for the most current version of this document.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends six principles for minimizing the spread of this disease:

- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid close contact: maintain a two-meter distance from people who are not in your household.
- Wear masks in public and in settings where it is difficult to maintain physical distance.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Monitor your health daily and stay at home if you are sick or have symptoms of illness.

In the context of MTR courses, the following additional specifics apply.

### **1. Follow the rules.**

Any MTR course must comply with all local, state, and federal rules and mandates related to COVID-19. The course must also conform to any additional NSP guidelines; see updated guidelines at the NSP link listed below.

As with all NSP courses, all participants must read and sign the NSP training release form, available on the NSP website at Member Resources > Instructor Resources.

### **2. Allow for social distancing.**

- Evidence suggests that lengthy indoor gatherings expose people to larger viral loads than brief indoor gatherings or outdoor gatherings. For this reason, consider holding as many of the in-person class meetings as possible outdoors. Outdoor meetings in warm months are preferable to indoor meetings in cold months.
- Whenever feasible, use internet-mediated facilities such as Zoom WebEx, or other media in place of indoor course meetings.
- For indoor, in-person meetings, seek well-ventilated spaces, and plan for short interactions with frequent breaks. Do not schedule in-person, indoor gatherings involving more people than federal, state, local, and NSP guidelines, if any, permit or recommend.
- Minimize physical contact among participants. Ensure that participants, indoors or outdoors, can remain physically separated by at least 2 meters (roughly 6 feet) at all times.
- During in-person, indoor gatherings, require all participants—instructors and students—to wear masks. Ask students to agree to this protocol before the course starts.
- In many cases, instructors may be able to replace traditional classroom presentations with well-designed, hands-on exercises that participants can conduct on their own, documenting their outcomes electronically. Examples include navigation exercises based on a prescribed list of coordinates (documented by photographs) and rescue-rigging exercises conducted via internet-mediated video.

(documented by instructor verification). Exercises of this type are arguably better, pedagogically, than traditional lectures.

- For gear disinfection guidelines, consult resources posted by the American Mountain Guides Association and the Colorado Mountain Club at the websites listed below.

### 3. Adopt safe administrative procedures.

- Instructors should screen course participants (a) two weeks before the start of the course and (b) within 24 hours of the start of the course. Screening should include a written questionnaire with at least the following two questions:
    - “During the past two weeks, have you had in-person contact with anyone who was diagnosed with Covid-19 or who was suspected of being infected with Covid-19?”
    - Within the past 24 hours, have you experienced any of the following Covid-19 symptoms? (Use the most current list at the CDC website below.)
- Any participant—instructor or student—who answers yes to either of these questions or who is sick with any contagious illness must not participate in any in-person session, indoors or outdoors.
- Spend time at the beginning of the course explicitly reviewing pandemic-related protocols, to promote students’ confidence in the course and their willingness to adhere to the procedures.
  - Set a good example: Follow the protocols that you have established, and make note of them as you do.
  - If your course involves student fees, it is a good idea to advertise full refunds in cases where registered participants do not attend because of illness. This policy reduces incentives for people to participate when they are sick.

### 4. Add pandemic safety to the standard field-session safety measures.

- Transportation to and from field sessions should adhere to all distancing guidelines. A good rule for vehicle travel is to require participants to provide their own transportation to the trailhead for any field session and to recommend no more than one household per vehicle.
- To the extent possible, use outdoor recreation areas close to home.
- Field sessions must include measures to avoid disease transmission via equipment handling, meals, drinking water, sleeping quarters, and waste disposal. All waste disposal must adhere to Leave No Trace standards, supplemented by pre-use and post-use alcohol-based sanitization of seats when outhouses must be used. Participants from different households should:
  - manage separate drinking- and cooking-water collection and treatment systems;
  - carry, prepare, and eat meals separately, using separate stoves and pots;
  - sleep in different shelters;
  - use separate personal hygiene materials.
- In certain outdoor activities, such as field-session travel, protective face coverings are neither necessary nor recommended. During aerobic activities, face coverings get wet with exhaled aerosols and are therefore potentially hazardous. But participants must keep protective face coverings readily available and wear them during low-intensity field activities, when passing other parties, when stopping for rests, or whenever separation of two meters or more is not feasible. Buffs® or equivalent headwear offer a convenient, multi-use option for the mountain environment.
- Each participant (or household) must carry and use his or her own map, compass, GPS device, emergency shelter material, fire-starting material, ice axe (if needed), crampons (if needed), over-snow travel equipment, personal first-aid supplies, and hand sanitizer. Refrain from using other people’s gear.
- Use personal protective equipment (gloves, eye protection, masks) whenever administering first aid.
- As with all NSP field sessions, instructors must have, in advance of any course, an appropriate evacuation plan for participants who exhibit signs or symptoms of illness during an MTR field session.
- Group instruction in hands-on rescue-rigging poses special challenges for physical distancing. The following guidelines provide some useful rules:

- All participants should wear vinyl or nitrile gloves under work or belay gloves, eyewear (such as glasses, sunglasses, or goggles) and masks when handling ropes, cordelettes, webbing, or hardware. Instructors should include vinyl or nitrile gloves with the group rigging gear, and all participants should bring their own work or belay gloves.
- After finishing a rescue-rigging session, each participant should remove and dispose of the protective gloves using procedures consistent with *Outdoor Emergency Care*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, then wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Instructors should include hand sanitizer with the rigging gear and provide a disposal bag for all medical waste, including discarded protective gloves.

## References

American Mountain Guides Association, Responsible Return to Work, <https://amga.com/responsible-return-work/>, retrieved 19 July 2020.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coronavirus (Covid-19) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>, retrieved 19 July 2020.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Symptoms of Coronavirus, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>, retrieved 19 July 2020.

Colorado Mountain Club, COVID-19 and Colorado Mountain Club Programming, <https://www.cmc.org/COVID-19andCMCProgramming.aspx>, look for the link for “Protocols for CMC Schools” and go to Appendix VII, retrieved 19 July 2020.

National Ski Patrol, COVID-19 Updates, <https://nsp.org/covid-19-updates/>, retrieved 19 July 2020.