

Pacific Crest Trail Association

Covid-19 Trail Maintenance Safety Protocols¹

The Covid-19 pandemic affects every aspect of the Pacific Crest Trail community, from the feasibility of long-distance hikes and horseback rides on the PCT, to the health and safety of the PCTA's 14,000 members and 2,000 volunteers. We empathize with all those impacted by this public health crisis. The PCTA has taken steps throughout the pandemic to reduce the risk of the virus to the trail community. Safety is always the PCTA's top priority. The PCTA's policies and engagement levels allow variation in volunteer activities based on location, conditions, and government guidance.

The PCTA's volunteer activities are **optional** and **non-essential**. Your health and safety is our top priority, and **your participation is at your discretion**. We understand everyone has different levels of comfort and acceptable risk. **If you aren't comfortable returning to trail work when others are, we support you in returning to trail work when you are ready!**

This document relates to the safety protocols that will be taken on trail maintenance projects to manage the inherent risk of group activity during the current pandemic. The PCTA's protocols are built on the belief that we can protect ourselves and our communities through collective action and wide adoption of public health measures. [According to the CDC](#), the best protection from Covid-19 will be a combination of getting a Covid-19 vaccine, wearing a mask, staying at least six feet away from others, avoiding crowds, and washing your hands often. All project participants, including those who have received Covid-19 vaccines,² must implement the following safety protocols.

Until further notice:

- All volunteer activities will follow all enhanced Covid-19 safety protocols outlined in this document, including physical distancing. If stricter local regulations apply, they must be followed.
- Volunteers under 18 may participate in accordance with [PCTA's Policy for Working with Minors](#).³
- PCTA projects will not operate communal kitchens where kitchen gear is shared by multiple households. In general, each volunteer (or volunteers from the same household) will provide, store, and prepare food for themselves only. Sharing may be acceptable only to the extent that households can continuously maintain proper physical distancing and any touched surfaces can be disinfected between uses by different households.⁴
- Projects involving volunteer packers are permissible as long as physical distancing between volunteers from different households can be maintained.
- PCTA will make available all required PPE including hand and equipment sanitizer.

PCTA will monitor Covid-19 guidance and adapt these protocols as necessary.

Engagement Levels

	Stay Home, Stay Healthy	Level A	Level B	Level C	Peak Engagement
Activities Allowed	No volunteer activities. Staff may take part in essential work as approved by agency staff.	Scouting, project planning, tool maintenance. (No tool use in field.)	Day projects that can be completed by small groups while maintaining physical distance from other participants who are not from the same household. Examples include brushing, tread work, logout, scouting with volunteers from different households. ⁵	All trail maintenance or construction activities, not requiring closer than 6 feet spacing.	All trail maintenance and construction activities.
Timeframe*	When the public is mandated by state or county government to stay home, no volunteer projects will occur.	As individual land management agency units reinstate sponsored volunteer agreements, PCTA may enter Level A.	Individual land management agency units will enter Level B when agency staff and the associated PCTA Regional Representative agree that local public health guidance allows for small day projects.	Individual land management agency units will enter Level C when agency staff and the associated PCTA Regional Representative agree that local public health guidance allows for overnight projects with up to 10 individuals.	When California, Oregon, and Washington lift public health restrictions. This may occur on a state-to-state basis.
Participants	None	PCTA volunteer leaders, existing section adopters, caretakers, stewards, scouts with members of volunteer's household.	Participants of all ages and skills levels. However, on some projects, registration may be restricted based on the experience level ⁶ of volunteers.**	Same as Level B.	Participants of all ages and skills levels.
Overnight Projects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Group Size	0	Solo or based on shared households.	6	10	
Travel⁷	None	Participants must comply with current government restrictions on travel and follow CDC guidelines to protect yourself and slow the spread of Covid-19 when using transportation: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/using-transportation.html	Same as Level A.	Same as Level A.	No restrictions.
Food & Beverage ***		Each household must provide their own.	Same as Level A.	Same as Level A.	PCTA resumes offering snacks, meals, beverages.

* Check the PCTA website for the current engagement level of your local agency unit: www.pcta.org/volunteer/covid-19-volunteer-protocols

** Volunteers learning new tools and skills benefit from close interaction and coaching from crew leaders and other experienced trail maintainers. This is difficult while maintaining physical distancing, limiting tool-sharing, etc. Registration limits will be determined by the crew leader and PCTA staff and will vary by project. Level B-C projects will typically allow no more than two new volunteers per experienced crew leader. There may be projects that are not open to volunteers who do not have trail maintenance experience.

*** Reimbursement for meals on overnight projects may be available if planned in advance and in coordination with PCTA staff, and according to PCTA's Volunteer Expense Reimbursement Policy.

Basic Prevention:

- Keep anyone showing Covid-19 symptoms completely out of the worksite.
 - Any volunteer experiencing symptoms or who has been in close proximity to sick individuals must stay home and quarantine as per CDC recommendations: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>
- Require proper respiratory etiquette. Cover coughs, sneezes, etc. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/stop-the-spread-of-germs.pdf>
- All volunteers must bring/wear masks⁸ to reduce the spread of aerosol droplets. Masks must be worn when within 10 feet of others. See the CDC's "Guide to Masks" for how to select and special considerations for masks: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>
- Practice physical distancing by keeping six feet or more away from others—best practice being 10 to 15 feet apart when physically exerting one's self and/or downwind of other people. No trail work shall be conducted requiring people to be closer than six feet, including most forms of rock work, small crosscut saw use, clearing of bucked logs requiring more than one person, etc.
- Utilize frequent and thorough hand washing, especially before and after meals, touching your face or after sneezing, coughing. If soap and running water are not immediately available, alcohol-based sanitizer containing at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol should be used, or biodegradable hand soap used away from water sources and the trail. <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/HandSanitizer-p.pdf>
- All individuals who plan to participate in in-person volunteer projects must attend a phone/videoconference PCTA training⁹ on Covid-19 safety measures. These trainings will be offered regularly. Individuals must attend this training once per calendar year. Volunteers will also participate in project specific Tailgate Safety Sessions. These may occur prior to a project via phone/videoconference or in-person at the start of a project.¹⁰ If in-person, the crew must be in a location that allows them to converse while maintaining physical distance from one another and the public.
- For Engagement Level B and C:
 - All group volunteer projects must include a handwashing station¹¹ staged at vehicles with soap and water for participants to use. While on trail, crew leaders will carry and make hand sanitizer available and/or allow volunteers to return to staging vehicle to use hand washing station.

Screening:

- Advanced registration is required for all Level B and C projects. Registration will typically be facilitated through PCTA's website¹² or by contacting PCTA staff.
- All sign in sheets, waivers, JHAs, etc. will be completed electronically before the project. Volunteers are required to sign a Covid-19 waiver that they are willing to abide by PCTA's Covid-19 policies and procedures, have determined that participation in a PCTA activity will not unduly jeopardize their safety based on their personal health history risks, and have completed a Covid-19 self-evaluation.
- Experiencing Covid-19 symptoms, having a positive Covid-19 test, or being in close contact with someone with Covid-19 will rule out a volunteer's participation on a work trip, until that individual meets the CDC's guidance for being around others: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>

Worksite:

- Limit contact with local communities and trail users to protect the public and all volunteers as much as possible. Avoid busy trails or peak use times, including weekends. Choose access points that allow sufficient parking space for all participants while still allowing for passage of emergency vehicles.
- Maintain a self-contained and self-sufficient work site as is feasible. If trail users outside the volunteer work crew are in proximity to trail work or the volunteers, volunteers must step off the trail to maintain at least six feet of distance.
- Snack, water, and lunch breaks must allow for physical distancing (10 feet).
- For Engagement Level C projects: If camped at a project site, the following precautions must be taken:
 - Set up tents/trailers/cooking areas at least six feet¹³ apart from each other –best practice being more than 10 to 15 feet apart, as terrain allows.
 - Maintain at least six feet of physical distance in common areas such as toilets, wash areas, and campfires. Cloth face coverings must be worn when within 10 feet of others.

Equipment:

- PCTA will make available all required PPE. Volunteers are asked to provide their own gloves and masks when possible. If they cannot, PCTA will provide but not have the volunteers return used gloves or masks.
- Assign tools and equipment to a specific volunteer for the day, including hand tools, tool-specific PPE, radios, etc. Tools should remain as assigned. If a tool must be utilized by a different crew member then it must be disinfected between uses.¹⁴
- No fire lining or chain passing of tools and equipment in and out of tool caches or vehicles.
- At the end of each day or work trip, the crew leader is responsible for properly cleaning, disinfecting and returning tool(s) and equipment to the storage area.¹⁵
- Small PPE items, such as hard hats, eye protection and gloves, can be sent home with participants. When returned, either at the end of a project or once Covid-19 safety protocols are no longer in place, the crew leader must clean and disinfect items with sanitizer before the next use.

Evacuation & Exposure Plan:

- Isolate and quarantine a sick volunteer as quickly as possible from other volunteers, making sure the project First Aid Lead has appropriate PPE, is able to monitor the health of the sick individual and provide supportive care as needed and at a distance if possible.
- Notify PCTA and dispatch immediately per local communication protocols to advise if the sick volunteer will self-evacuate or requires assistance. Be sure to advise dispatch of the potential of a Covid-19 case so first responders and medivac personnel are aware.
- Monitor the rest of the volunteers for signs of exposure/infection.
- Evacuate sick volunteer and remainder of crew.

- Volunteers who test positive for Covid-19 will be directed to self-quarantine according to current CDC guidance.¹⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html> PCTA staff will communicate periodically with any sick volunteers.
- Volunteers who have come into close contact with an individual who has tested positive for Covid-19 (co-volunteer or otherwise) will be directed to self-quarantine according to current CDC guidance¹⁷: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html> Close contact is defined as six feet for a prolonged period. If the PCTA learns that a volunteer has tested positive, the PCTA will:
 - Conduct an investigation to determine co-volunteers who may have had close contact with the confirmed positive volunteer in the prior 14 days;
 - Direct those individuals who have had close contact with the confirmed-positive volunteer to self-quarantine according to CDC guidance;
 - If applicable, notify any staff, vendors/suppliers or visitors who may have had close contact with the confirmed-positive volunteer.
- If a volunteer learns that they have come into close contact with a confirmed-positive individual outside of the trail project but within the 14 days prior to the project, they must alert PCTA of the close contact.
- A volunteer who becomes sick with Covid-19 and suspects it to be from volunteering on a PCTA-sponsored project should work with PCTA staff to contact the Forest Service to submit a claim.
- Except for circumstances in which the PCTA is legally required to report workplace occurrences of communicable disease, the confidentiality of all medical conditions will be maintained in accordance with applicable law and to the extent practical under the circumstances. When it is required, the number of persons who will be informed that an unnamed volunteer has tested positive will be kept to the minimum needed to comply with reporting requirements and to limit the potential for transmission to others. The PCTA reserves the right to inform other volunteers that an unnamed co-volunteer has been diagnosed with Covid-19 if the other volunteers might have been exposed to the disease so the volunteers may take measures to protect their own health. The PCTA also reserves the right to inform staff, vendors/suppliers or visitors that an unnamed volunteer has been diagnosed with Covid-19 if they might have been exposed to the virus so those individuals may take measures to protect their own health.

Frequently Asked Questions

PCTA is maintaining a real-time FAQ document to answer additional questions and implementation details. <https://pcta.box.com/s/6zh3o9rmsmqm4g83k1kv6ots8t2dzrlv>

If you have additional questions, please email them to volunteer@pcta.org or your local PCTA Regional Representative.

¹ Updated 2/2021. Name of document updated. Previously titled Safely Reengaging in Trail Maintenance, aka Reengagement Plan.

² Updated 2/2021. Added guidance on applicability of protocols to vaccinated persons.

³ Updated 2/201. Guidance on minors updated. Previous versions required minors to be accompanied by a parent.

⁴ Updated 2/2021. Previous versions didn't allow for sharing of gear under any circumstances.

⁵ Updated 11/2020. Clarified that scouting falls in Level B when it involves different households.

⁶ Updated 2/2021. 100-hour requirement removed. See new guidance on experience levels in footnote to chart.

⁷ Updated 4/2021. Condensed all travel guidance, including air travel, public transit and carpooling, into one row in the Engagement Levels table and referred all participants to CDC safety guidelines for transportation.

⁸ Updated 4/2021. Changed "cloth face covering" to "mask" to align with USDA and CDC language and inserted CDC resource on masks.

⁹ Updated 2/2021. Previous versions required pre-project video check in with all participating volunteers to cover Covid-19 information as well as the normal Tailgate Safety Session information for each project.

¹⁰ Updated 2/2021 to include the option of in-person Tailgate Safety Sessions. Previous versions required they be done before arriving at the trailhead.

¹¹ Updated 2/2021. Deleted "foot-pump operated." Other means of handwashing are acceptable.

¹² Updated 2/2021 to add website option.

¹³ Updated 2/2021. Previous versions recommended a minimum of 20 feet.

¹⁴ Updated 2/2021. Previous versions didn't allow for tool-sharing under any circumstances. Previous version specified that volunteers could bring their own tools and they were encouraged to clean and sanitize personal tools at the end of the day. This still applies.

¹⁵ Updated 3/2021. Eliminated PCTA's Protocols for Sanitizing Tools and Equipment (v. Aug2020). Hard surfaces of equipment may be disinfected with sanitizer.

¹⁶ Updated 2/2021. Removed specification of timeframes for quarantine and documentation clearing volunteer's return after hospitalization, instead referring to current guidance.

¹⁷ Updated 4/2021. Removed specification of timeframes for quarantine. The provided CDC webpage details who needs to quarantine, including differences for individuals who are/are not fully vaccinated against Covid-19.