

Guidance for A.T. Trail Management and Fieldwork

(Updated May 2021)

ATC, APPA, and the USFS required that all volunteers and staff suspend all trail-related activities when COVID-19 was spreading across the United States. As more hikers seek opportunities to safely recreate on the Appalachian Trail, all cooperative management partners recognize the need to protect trail resources and to provide a safe hiking experience.

The following protocols were developed by a task force of Appalachian Trail Conservancy staff, A.T. volunteer leaders, NPS-APPA and USFS staff. It will be updated periodically when new information about COVID-19 becomes available. This resource is intended to minimize the risk of exposure to the novel COVID-19 virus while staff and volunteers re-engage with trail management and fieldwork activities once these conditions are met:

- Local, state, and land management authorities have re-opened the trail in the area;
- Staff and Volunteers are clear of symptoms;
- Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment exists and is available for respective tasks
- Staff and Volunteers have been vaccinated/herd immunity achieved –(government agencies cannot ask staff or volunteers their vaccination status),

The procedures outlined here are based on evidence that the virus can be contracted through close association with an infected person or by contact with a contaminated surface. The virus can also be transmitted to others even before any symptoms are exhibited. The AT Adaptive Recovery Task Force is providing this guidance for staff and A.T. Clubs to limit the spread of and exposure to COVID-19 in a consistent manner. A.T. Clubs may offer members additional guidance to minimize risks.

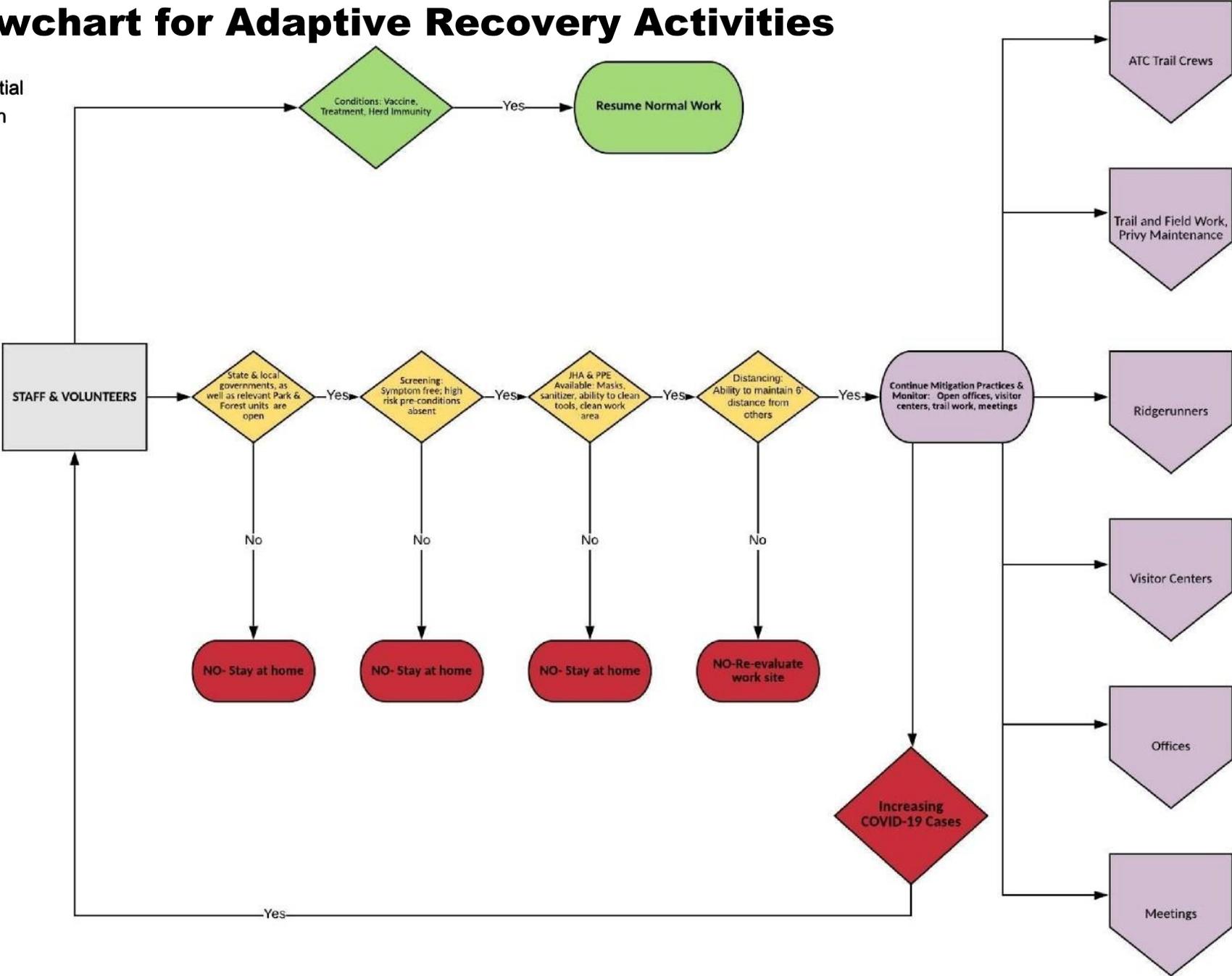
Volunteer activities are optional, and participation is at the discretion of the volunteer. Declining to work on one's section will not affect a volunteer's current status. Volunteers and staff who fall into a high risk category are advised to carefully assess travel and work outside their homes, and avoid all activities that could increase exposure to COVID-19.

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Decision Flowchart for Adaptive Recovery Activities

The following represents the initial decision process for any work in the field related to the standard operating procedures found within this document.



Phased Opening Protocols: (Re) Opening (Working in the Field)

Procedures for Trail work are based on an understanding that since local or site conditions are prone to change, providing phases offers perspectives to safely work in the field. Refer to the [A.T. Maintenance Risk Exposure Scale](#) to determine what activities are best suited to Phase 2 and 3 when states and public lands have re-opened.

Phase 1 is the period when new COVID-19 cases continue in the area without a decreasing rate, and during which time trail maintenance and fieldwork on the A.T. is essentially on a stand-down while efforts are made to flatten the transmission curve. During this time, only staff and volunteers that have been requested to address Trail emergencies or maintenance priorities are permitted to work or volunteer on the A.T.

Phase 2 is in effect when local COVID-19 cases have been diminishing for at least 14 days in the county where staff and volunteers reside, as well as in the county where work will take place.

Phase 3 is characterized by further diminished local, county-level cases of COVID-19.

Review 14-day county-level data - [HERE](#)

In all Phases:

- Establish and continue communication with local and State authorities to determine current infection levels and mitigation strategies in your community.
- **Protect** and support staff and volunteers who are at **higher risk**¹ for severe illness by advising everyone about the risks associated with COVID-19 during trail and field work.
- All staff and volunteers should routinely assess risks and adapt work to evolving conditions by using tools that help to assess risk (See [Risk Calculator App](#) and [CDC Self-Screening Tool](#)), and develop operational leadership through [Trail Safe Training](#).

Phase 1: Are COVID-19 cases increasing or are not decreasing in your area and work site? If, yes, then:

- Trail maintenance and emergency response is only for requested workers²
- Work activities should focus on:
 - Health, Life and Safety

Phase 2: Have local, county-level (home and work site) COVID-19 cases been mostly diminishing for 14 days.

- All staff and volunteers can re-engage with trail maintenance and fieldwork with no more than **four** staff or volunteers working together while maintaining social distancing.
- Work activities should focus on:
 - Trail Planning/Scouting
 - Health, Life, and Safety
 - Maintaining Trail Access
 - Identify and Document Resource Damage

Phase 3: Have local, county-level (home and work site) COVID-19 cases continued to diminish or not increase?

- All staff and volunteers can work with social distancing measures for groups up to **10 people**.

¹ Higher risk: People 65 years and older. People with and of the following conditions: chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma; serious heart conditions, immunocompromised, severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher), diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease.

² Land manager requests field support to address Trail emergencies and priorities.

- Work activities should focus on:
 - Health, Life, and Safety
 - Trail Planning
 - Maintaining Trail Access
 - Repairing Resource Damage that may include work beyond essential fundamental maintenance, provided the scope of work avoids closer social interaction necessary for some large projects
 - In-person training, when available from hosts, provided with appropriate social distancing.

Volunteer and Staff Management Considerations for Field Work

1.1 General Recommendations for Work Trips (Phases 1-3)

Clubs and staff leading work trips should:

- Ask individual volunteers to attest that they have read the [CDC guidelines](#) regarding underlying conditions that would put them at high risk of severe illness, and to participate in an activity only if they have determined that participation will not unduly jeopardize their safety.
- Update the template the organization uses for work-trip rosters to include a statement acknowledging review of above guidelines from CDC and their determination to participate.
- Volunteers and staff who have a fever, [symptoms](#), or have had exposure to a confirmed case within the 14 days prior to a work trip, should remain at home and not participate in the trip.
- If a volunteer or staff member from a work trip receives a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 within 14-days after a work trip, that volunteer is required to disclose this to their work trip leader and ATC regional office within 24-hours of discovery.
- Advise participants on work trips that if they do become ill following a workday to notify you as trip leader so you can communicate to others who may have been in recent contact.
- Determine any gaps in trail management areas due to volunteers' decisions to decline work, notify ATC regional staff, and temporarily reassign the trail section if/as needed.
- Cultivate a community of communication, transparency and empathy where disclosures are shared, managed, and acted upon without any stigma or discrimination.
- Work trips in the field for section maintenance or corridor work, by staff and volunteers, should have at least two people as much as possible.

1.2 ATC Staff Only: Healthy Operations (Phases 1-3)

- Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices, if feasible.
- Monitor absenteeism to identify any trends in employee absences due to illness. This might indicate spread of COVID-19 or other illness. Have a roster of trained back-up staff in order to maintain sufficient staffing levels.
- ATC's Human Resources staff is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns.
- Create a communication system for staff and families for self-reporting of symptoms and notification of exposures and closures.

2.1 Safety Operations for Trail and Field Work Activities

2.1.1. Preparing

Check for [signs and symptoms](#) (Phases 1-3)

- All staff and volunteers should establish routine, daily health checks, including temperature screening prior to any work trips.
- Require staff and volunteers to stay home if they are sick.

2.1.2 Promote [healthy hygiene practices](#) (Phases 1-3)

- All work parties should have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol, cleaned cloth face masks, and tissues.
- All staff and volunteers should bring extra water and biodegradable soap to wash hands regularly throughout the day.
- Volunteers should independently, and leaders should especially, reinforce [washing hands](#). Volunteers and work trip leaders are encouraged to establish [handwash station](#) for use at the end of day before getting back in car. Hand sanitizers can be used when washing is not possible, being aware that it is less effective than washing.
- Ensure volunteers bring their own washable work gloves, rather than issuing loaner gloves. Clean after every use.
- Reiterate on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 at tailgate safety briefings. Include reminders to properly wash hands, promote everyday protective measures, and properly wear a face covering.

2.1.3 Intensify cleaning and disinfection (Phases 1-3)

- [Clean, sanitize, and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces (for example, all tools, equipment, vehicles) multiple times per day. Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants will work. Here is an approved [list of effective cleaners](#), but be sure to read the labels to make sure the cleaner is safe to use on the different surfaces.
- Do not share tools and equipment once group gear has been provided, including hand tools. Per NPS Public Health Officer, the sharing of tools should continue to be discouraged, but proper hand hygiene should be emphasized – if you need to share tools, make sure to sanitize, wash your hands, don't touch your mouth or eyes.
- Crew leaders (volunteer and staff) are responsible to wash, rinse and sanitize group tools, safety glasses, helmets, and other equipment at the end of the day before storing. Per CDC recommendations, unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronavirus when properly diluted. Prepare a bleach solution in well-ventilated area by mixing: 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water, or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water.
- Avoid sharing items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants.

2.1.4 Ensure social distancing

Phase 2 and 3

- Plan for smaller work parties: **Phase 2 - group size limit of 4; Phase 3 - 10 or fewer people.**
- Prevent risk of transmitting COVID-19 by avoiding face-to-face and immediate contact (such as shaking hands, holding hands or high-fives).
- If group multi-day (no camping) work trips occur, ensure that trips include the same group of volunteers and staff each day, and that people respect social distancing / isolation overnight.

- Ensure your sign-in roster is accurate for each outing. Trip leader should write down names and ask for pre-filled waivers.
- Devise safe ways to collect required waivers, such as an electronic waiver to complete pre-trip, or dropping waivers in a plastic bag. It is especially important to keep updated work trip rosters if you need to identify people retroactively who may have been together before a positive diagnosis.
- Require advanced registration for work events rather than ad hoc meetings at rendezvous locations to guarantee not more than 10 people at a single location. Turn away or align separate activity leaders and alternative rendezvous locations for subsequent registrations up to group sizes of 10.
- Do not carpool with anyone other than a household member unless all parties have been vaccinated. If carpooling with vaccinated individuals, face masks are required. Improve the ventilation in the vehicle by opening the windows or setting the air ventilation/air conditioning on non-recirculation mode. Volunteers should follow CDC guidelines regarding hygienic practices, such as using alcohol wipes to disinfect surfaces or using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, or washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Per NPS Public Health Officer, even if all parties are fully vaccinated, ride sharing should continue to be discouraged, despite environmental impacts. Public health takes priority. If members of different households are in the same vehicle, they should maximize distancing within the vehicle whenever possible and must always wear face masks. Refrain from touching surfaces, if possible, when riding in a vehicle. Encourage volunteers to sit as far as possible from the driver, such as in the rear seat diagonally across from the driver.

- Space out work on trail management and fieldwork activities and while seated for breaks.
- Not all locations on the Trail are “socially isolated” due to the scenic nature of the site, the proximity to population centers, or ease of access. Volunteers planning for work at higher visitation sites should adapt to changing conditions. It may be necessary to end planned trail work if the area becomes too crowded to maintain sufficient social distancing.
- Each person should buy, store and prepare their own meals, drinks, and snacks.

Travel Considerations - (Phase 2 and 3)

- Beyond the work activity, staff and volunteers should weigh the risk of potential exposure by [traveling to the Trail](#). When traveling to or from the Trail for work trips, avoid and generally minimize stops for food, gas, restrooms, etc.
- See comments above.
- Keep disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer in the vehicle as an easy and effective preventive measure to disinfect all touchpoints before and after use, including door handle, key fob, steering wheel, inside door buttons, seat belts, arm rests, gear shifters and touchscreens.
- Pumping gas
 - Have disinfectant wipes handy for wiping down the gas pump handle and the payment keypad before pumping.
 - Carry disposable nitrile or latex gloves in your car to use when gripping the pump handle and using the keypad. Short of that, use paper towels that are available at the pump or have some with you to cover your hands when you grip the handle.
 - Invert the gloves and throw them away, and also any paper towels you might have used.
 - Use hand sanitizer to make sure your hands are clean after you're done and before you get back into your car.
 - Wash hands immediately upon returning home.

Overnight Site Management

Privy maintenance includes everything from routine cleaning and knocking down the “cone” to replacing the compost bin in a moldering privy and relocating a riser. Privy maintenance may be among the riskiest tasks that volunteers and staff undertake.

A.T. Shelter and Privy Advisory Notice - Post at Trailheads, Shelters, on Social Media and Websites

Because shelters may be crowded and safe distancing may not be possible, hikers are advised to be self-reliant and use a personal shelter.

Please note that many shelters and privies are officially closed, even if they are not posted closed at the site location.

Shelters and Privies: Phases 2 - 3

- Shelters can be maintained (swept, trash pick-up) by one individual or by family members following all COVID-19 safety protocols.
- All privy maintenance should strictly follow current health and safety guidelines to avoid exposure to COVID-19 and other transmittable diseases. (See: [ATC Backcountry Sanitation Manual](#) and [Privy Management JHA](#))
- If privies and shelters are officially closed by the land managing agency (NPS, USFS, state agencies), indicate this on the signage as well.

Privy cleaning and maintenance PPE

- Disposable coveralls
- Disposable Masks
- Rubber gloves
- Bleach Wipes
- Contractor Bags (at least 2)
- Bio-hazard Bag(s)
- Shovel or Rake
- Small Trash Bag (for wipes)

Trash Pick-up: Phases 2 - 3

- PPE Required: Non-permeable gloves, disinfectant, and hand sanitizer, trash pick-up tools, disposable or washable coveralls, eye protection.
- Training Required: Blood Borne Pathogen (BBP) Training and/or BBP training as provided through First Aid training for trash pick up at high risk sites and for high risk trash items.
- If emptying trash receptacle, disinfect all trash receptacle touch surfaces before emptying.
- When picking-up loose trash, utilize trash picker poles/rigs whenever possible and carefully place trash in trash bags/receptacles, taking care to avoid unnecessary bodily contact with trash bags/receptacles.
- Place sealed/tied trash bags in the vehicle securely away from all passengers.
- Carefully remove gloves and coveralls and dispose of them in a trash receptacle. Remove coveralls first, and then gloves.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol as soon as possible.

Monitoring

Plan for when a staff member or volunteer becomes sick (Phases 1-3)

- Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits COVID-like symptoms during Trail and fieldwork.
 - Procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes sick during a work trip:
 - If a volunteer or staff become sick on a work trip and can safely return home in a personal vehicle without stopping, then those individuals should immediately leave the worksite.
 - If sick volunteers or staff are not able to safely leave the work site, first responders should use all available means to avoid possible exposure to COVID-19 while providing necessary care in the field. Call 911.
 - Once a volunteer or staff member is receiving necessary care, notify others (staff, volunteers, etc) that someone they have been in contact with has COVID-like symptoms and that you have notified them to be vigilant in monitoring their own health. Don't confirm or deny when asked who the coworker or volunteer is — remind staff and volunteers that medical information is private and you must respect everyone's rights. Also, notify local health officials of any possible case of COVID-19 and provide information they request.
 - Wait 24 hours before you clean or disinfect any surface that may have become infected and is exposed to other staff, volunteers, or hikers to reduce risk to individuals cleaning. If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible. Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants.
 - Advise sick staff members and volunteers not to return until they have met CDC [criteria to discontinue home isolation](#).
 - Inform anyone exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and to follow CDC guidance for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals if symptoms develop.
 - Anyone that has had prolonged close contact with a sick individual will need to follow quarantine guidelines and cannot return to trail work.
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Re-evaluation and ‘Phasing Down’ Field Operations

Phases 1-3

- It is very important to check State and local health department notices daily about spread of COVID-19 in the area and adjust operations accordingly.
 - When COVID-19 cases are significantly increasing, trail and field work should scale back or cease operations.
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Appalachian Trail Maintenance Activities COVID-19 Exposure Risk Scale*

Increase Effort to Mitigate Risk

Spike Trail crews <8 participants

Privy maintenance

Ridgerunners

Overnight site management

Trash Pickup

In field training <10 participants

Day Trail crew <10 participants

Hazard Tree removals at overnight sites
(3-4 crew)

Blowdown removal with chainsaws

Basic Trail Maintenance

Hazard Tree Assessments

Trail Condition Assessments

External threat assessments

Land Conservation assessments

Open Area management

Road Inventory

Invasive species management

Natural Resource monitoring and
restoration

Trail Relocation Scouting

Corridor Monitoring

Higher Risk

Moderate Risk

and
Bound
ary
Mainte
nance

Lower Risk

* Based on the potential to be in another person's air space or for being exposed to a contaminated surface

