**Rationale for updating Guidelines:**

This document updates the June 2022 version of the Guidelines for AWG and AWG Chapter field trips, based on our experience with multi-day field trips since then and increased scientific understanding of how readily the virus spreads, including among vaccinated people. New variants of the COVID (SARS CoV-2) virus are becoming ever more infectious, with illnesses developing over a shorter time. Although the vaccinations and, especially, the boosters remain effective at helping prevent hospitalization and death, COVID remains a dangerous illness for vulnerable people – including many of the people who are old enough to have the time and money to come on our longer field trips. Moreover, the current vaccines only marginally reduce the potential to develop long-lasting symptoms (“long COVID”), so avoiding infection in the first place remains an important goal. On the plus side, we now have more testing tools, in particular at-home antigen tests, and remarkably effective masks are readily available.

The March 2021 and June 2022 versions of these Guidelines were intended to help field trip organizers think through how to design and run field trips as safely as possible in what we hoped were the waning days of the pandemic. Now that we have more experience running trips in a world where COVID remains a threat, as well as experience with managing COVID outbreaks on field trips, we’re updating these Guidelines to address measures to limit any COVID outbreak that may occur, especially on longer field trips.

We will update these guidelines as the pandemic evolves until (we hope) such guidelines are no longer necessary. Please bear in mind that these are GUIDELINES, not hard-and-fast rules. You may decide to loosen or tighten your Covid approach depending mainly on the demographics of the people you expect to come on a given field trip. Your trip-specific Covid protocols (including lack of protocols) are an important part of the planning process and should be available for participants to review before deciding to come.

**General guidelines for all trips:**

We encourage trip planners to consult and follow the CDC’s recommendations for events and gatherings ([Considerations for Events and Gatherings | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/party-planning/index.html)), as well as the recommendations for the local jurisdiction (county, state, country) being visited. (The CDC page includes a link to a directory of state and local health agencies.) Please consult these recommendations during planning and again a few weeks before the trip. If traveling through several states or outside the US, leaders should compile a list of phone numbers for local health authorities and medical facilities to bring along on the trip. In addition, student chapters should follow their university’s guidelines. Organizers should develop a trip-specific COVID plan, especially for any trip that involves group transportation and/or overnight stays indoors. Accommodation venues may also have their own protocols that will need to be incorporated into the trip protocols. Participants must agree to follow the COVID protocols established before the trip and any additional measures caused by the occurrence of COVID within the group. Organizers may wish to appoint someone to remind participants of the COVID procedures during the trip.
AWG’s policy has been that all trip participants have been fully vaccinated\(^1\), including available boosters, to the extent a participant is eligible. However, while trip organizers should encourage everyone to be vaccinated, we will enforce this only for longer trips. Participants who have had a recent case of COVID or a recent booster should be aware that protection from contracting it again is limited since new variants arise frequently. Participants should also do their best to avoid situations where they might be exposed to COVID in the week or so before traveling and also be encouraged to stay home if they don’t feel well.

Bear in mind that conditions such as asthma and allergies can cause people to cough, sneeze or have a drippy nose normally, so participants should be on the lookout for what are, for them, unusual symptoms. Everyone should take a COVID at-home antigen test before leaving home and be encouraged to stay home if they have any COVID symptoms. Each participant should be asked to bring at least 2 extra antigen tests. A participant who starts to have COVID symptoms, including a scratchy throat, stuffy head, dry cough, headache/fever, or gut symptoms should use an antigen test. However, it’s not uncommon for such tests to produce a false negative result for up to two days into a COVID infection, so that participant should be encouraged either to leave the trip (go home or find someplace where they can isolate) or somehow keep their distance from the rest of the group and be masked whenever around others, including those in their own pod, whether indoors or outdoors. Their fellow close contacts (room- or tent-mates, carpoolers) should also take antigen tests and should also be encouraged to keep their distance from the group and be masked both indoors and outdoors. If others in that group begin to have symptoms or test positive, the entire group should leave the trip. All participants should be encouraged to test a few days following the field trip and report any positive results to the trip organizers.

All participants should be aware that some participants will have good reasons to be extra careful about contracting COVID. They may wear masks at all times with the group throughout the trip and may choose to avoid close contact with unmasked participants.

Based on experience from our summer 2022 trips, it’s become clear that eating indoors in restaurants is likely a major risk factor with the newer variants – even greater than that of flying if people are very careful about masking. Indoor dining should be strongly discouraged, especially on longer trips.

Please bear in mind that this situation continues to evolve (both the virus and societal/governmental responses to it), and risk factors may continue to change. For example, COVID variants may arise that are completely resistant to the available vaccines. Therefore, all trips should be designed such that they can be canceled as close to the event as possible while minimizing the amount of money that AWG, a sponsoring AWG chapter, or the participants would lose. If you charge a fee for your field trip and have not required participants to obtain travel insurance, please consider budgeting to allow for at least a partial refund for last-minute cancellations, so as to discourage participants who don’t feel well from attending. For longer trips, encourage (or require in the case of foreign travel) everyone to obtain travel insurance.

---

\(^1\) A minimum of two weeks has passed after the final shot in the participant’s vaccination protocol.
insurance that includes coverage for COVID-related trip cancellation or interruption, isolation expenses, and medical treatment during the trip.

**Guidelines for short field trips (up to 4 days/ nights):**

Depending on group demographics and tolerance for potentially contracting Covid, protocols may be fairly relaxed, especially for small groups or trips where people are mostly outdoors. If group demographics demand a stricter approach, then participants from up to three households should be encouraged to form a “pod” that may travel, stay, and eat together. AWG advises chapters to run only field trips that can readily allow physical distancing between such pods. By this we mean:

- Each pod is in its own vehicle. Organizers should plan only stops that have sufficient safe parking for the anticipated number of cars, and participants should be warned if any roads are unsuitable for vehicles with low clearance. The vehicles may include rental vans for groups of participants who choose to form a larger pod, in which case everyone should wear a mask in the vehicles unless windows can be kept at least partially open, as weather allows. Smaller pods (i.e., carpools) may choose not to require wearing a mask in the vehicle if the pod members agree unanimously.
- Wearing a mask whenever in any indoor public space or wherever distancing is not feasible should be encouraged. Masking is optional outdoors.
- Individuals for whom Covid is particularly dangerous should be masked around others and spend nights in their own tent or motel room unless staying together with members of a pod as described above. For a camping-based trip, participants who aren’t from the same household should bring their own tents and sleep alone. An exception for indoor environments may be made if sleeping arrangements are such that beds can be kept several feet apart.
- Participants should avoid eating close together unless with members of their pod. Participants should sit outside or in their vehicles at lunchtime. Participants should also avoid eating indoors in restaurants, especially early in a trip, and instead get take-out to eat outside or in their own room or vehicle.

**Guidelines for longer field trips (5 days/ nights or more):**

COVID remains a source of mass disruption for trips long enough for infections to arise and potentially spread within the group. Moreover, outside the US, treatment options are more limited and harder to access, and isolation accommodations may be more difficult to find. Consequently, AWG’s guidelines for longer trips are stricter than for shorter trips.

Larger groups where everyone is fully vaccinated may do longer trips that aren’t physically distanced **within the group**, thus allowing for renting vans or buses and eating and rooming together. However, participants may unwittingly bring COVID to a group, especially if traveling to the trip location via a public mode of transportation, e.g., by air, bus, or train. Moreover, it’s become clear that it’s fairly easy to contract COVID during trips from even short exposures in public spaces. Consequently, everyone
must wear a high-quality (N95 or similar) mask in the vehicles or whenever indoors (as a group or individually) for the entire trip except when in their sleeping accommodations. An exception to this requirement may be made whenever vehicle windows can be kept at least partially open, as weather allows. For this reason, rental vans may be preferable to traveling in a bus, where the option to open windows is rare. Ideally, pairs of roommates should be assigned to the same vans throughout the trip, so that each van can effectively become its own pod.

All participants should test before leaving home, test before first gathering with the group, and then test every other day for the rest of the trip. Accommodations should be double occupancy at most, with the same roommates assigned throughout the trip.

Participants should be required to bring:

- Enough antigen tests to fulfill the trip testing requirements plus some extras in case COVID arises within the group and more frequent testing requirements are imposed. If someone tests positive, daily testing requirements may be imposed on roommates and other close contacts.
- Enough disposable masks to last through the trip.
- Extra prescription medications in case a participant contracts COVID and isolation prevents returning home as scheduled. When they book flights, participants should be aware that different airlines have different isolation requirements!
- Participants who are especially vulnerable to severe COVID may wish to obtain COVID anti-viral drugs like Paxlovid to bring along. Obtaining such drugs outside the USA is very difficult and may take longer than the period for which they’re effective (5 days from symptom onset).

Participants will still need to be careful to avoid exposure to COVID whenever out with the general public. This is especially important now that nearly all masking requirements have been dropped and means continuing to wear masks, physically distancing, and avoiding eating inside restaurants and hotel breakfast areas, especially when around people outside your group (including unmasked servers). Group restaurant meals may be planned only if the group will be seated outdoors and only near the end of the trip. Participants should always have the option of picking up food and taking it outside or to their room to eat. Time spent in gift shops and other crowded indoor environments should be minimized.

Participants should be on the lookout for symptoms that are not among their usual allergy or asthma symptoms and report them to the trip leaders. If a participant develops COVID symptoms and tests positive, they will need to leave the trip and isolate at their own expense for 5 days starting the day after symptoms appear, or longer if mandated by local health authorities or their airline. They may not rejoin the trip until they are symptom free and test negative; in practice, this means they likely won’t be able to rejoin at all since people typically continue to test positive for several days after symptoms go away. An exception may be made if a person has finished the COVID isolation period, is symptom-free and everyone else on the trip agrees to allow that person to rejoin even though they still test positive. This may mean renting their own vehicle to follow along.

If a participant develops COVID symptoms but tests negative, they should find separate accommodations, if possible, and they and their roommate should test daily. They may remain with the
field trip but must be masked at all times with the group, as should everyone riding in the same vehicle, even if windows are open. If testing is still negative on the third day of symptoms, it’s most likely a cold or allergies, so the participant may rejoin the group. However, masking at all times should continue until symptoms are gone to protect the rest of the group from illness, and COVID testing should continue for another day or so.

If possible, trip organizers should arrange for more than one geologic leader on a trip or someone local who could step in if a leader develops COVID symptoms. The budget should allow each geologic leader to have their own separate accommodations to the extent possible. The trip organizer should recruit a back-up trip runner and arrange for access to all trip planning documents, i.e., hard copies in a binder or on a USB drive that could be handed over, or on a Google Drive where that person has established access. If a leader develops COVID symptoms and must leave the trip, and no back-up leader is available, the participants will need to vote as to whether to continue the trip with no geologic leader. Each rented van must have more than one approved driver, so that participants will not be stranded.

Trip leaders will assist participants impacted by COVID (or a COVID scare) as much as they can without unduly impacting the rest of the trip. However, participants are responsible for any costs related to contracting COVID while on an AWG field trip and should carry travel insurance that includes coverage for trip interruption and any other costs related to leaving the trip (this is a hard requirement for foreign trips). These may include lodging, transportation costs (including rebooking flights) and any medical costs. Participants should not expect any reimbursement from AWG for the portion of the trip not attended.

Participants should be encouraged to test at least every other day for 3-4 days or if symptoms arise within a week following the field trip and to report any positive results to the trip organizers.