

NOLS Wilderness Medicine Communicable Disease Mitigation Practices and Expectations for Students



The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic raised questions about health and risk management while attending wilderness medicine courses. We want to ensure you are aware of how we're responding to the coronavirus pandemic, so you can make an informed decision about participation. These practices have been developed in consultation with federal, state, and local public health experts, peer organizations, and medical advisors and will continue to evolve as more information becomes known.

This document describes our expectations including COVID-19 vaccination, testing, communicable disease risk mitigation strategies, and NOLS' planned response in the event of illness during the course. Your choice to participate in a NOLS Wilderness Medicine course should be made based on your understanding of and agreement with these practices.

Wilderness medicine courses are designed to train responders to provide medical aid. Close physical contact is an inherent part of our courses. We interact with and touch each other when we practice the skills of wilderness medicine such as splinting, patient movement, bleeding control, basic life support and when we practice patient care with scenario based learning. NOLS Wilderness Medicine has always had curriculum and practices in place to educate students and to reduce the risk of disease transmission. We have implemented additional strategies to further reduce the risk of disease transmission associated with physical proximity, but we cannot eliminate it.

People who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 as defined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) should carefully consider, in conjunction with their health care provider, whether to attend a wilderness medicine course at this time.

Our ability to reduce risk to all participants relies on your commitment to choosing behaviors prior to and during your course that support the health and well being of everyone involved in your course.

NOLS reserves the right to cancel any course at any time based on changing information or restrictions that affect our ability or willingness to operate at a given location. We will notify students as soon as possible if this occurs.

Vaccination Policy

NOLS encourages you to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and up-to-date with any boosters you are eligible to receive.

Based on requirements of our clinical partners, WEMT students will continue to need to be fully vaccinated at the start of their WEMT course. In addition, we strongly recommend being up-to-date with all eligible boosters.

Will I be required to take COVID-19 tests during the course?

Students on Wilderness EMT courses need to submit a negative COVID-19 test taken within 3 days of their course start.

Earliest Test Day	Course Start Day
Friday	Monday

Communicable Disease Risk Mitigation Strategy

NOLS has instituted a 4-component strategy to decrease the risk of infectious disease spread in our classrooms. These practices reflect our assumption that every person is a potential carrier of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. We will model and describe them all in greater detail at the beginning of your course.

All participants are expected to participate fully in this strategy. Your actions directly affect the health and well being of all course participants.

Screening: We will rely on students and staff to report any illnesses and to act accordingly.

If you have any of the following, you should not attend class:

- Cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, headache, fatigue, nasal congestion or sneezing (different from pre-existing allergies), abdominal discomfort (nausea/diarrhea), muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell.
- A temperature of over 100.4F/38C.

Hygiene: We will provide the resources to practice heightened classroom hygiene. You will be expected to:

- Wash or sanitize your hands after interactions with others and/or entering or leaving group settings.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your mouth with a tissue or your arm if you sneeze or cough.
- Wipe down surfaces and equipment after use using the provided cleaning materials.

Personal Protective Equipment: We will provide some personal protective equipment for use in your wilderness medicine course including KN95 masks, gloves, and cleaning supplies. You will be expected to follow the guidelines your instructors establish.

Compliance/Culture: We believe in the value of training people to help others and in supporting the best public health practices. You will be expected to:

- Model your commitment to quality medical care by supporting these strategies.
- Help others remember and adapt to these new practices.
- Stay home if you feel sick or the instructor asks you to leave class based on symptoms.

Will my NOLS course be safe from coronavirus?

Contracting COVID-19, the disease caused by coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), is a new risk for everyone and (like other risks) cannot be eliminated. The updates to how NOLS operates a course have been developed and implemented to reduce exposure to COVID-19 and to detect signs of illness. For those who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 as defined by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC), please carefully consider, in conjunction with your healthcare provider, whether to attend a NOLS Wilderness Medicine course at this time.

Am I required to follow the stated practices?

Yes, all students and instructors are expected to adhere to the above practices and refusal to comply is grounds for dismissal from a course with no tuition refund. These practices are designed to reduce the risk of illness for all participants and would be expected in any setting where you are providing healthcare or first aid.

Have you made any updates to the paperwork I need to be aware of?

The NOLS Wilderness Medicine Student Agreement has been updated to include education about additional risks including:

- At times students will be in close physical proximity to one another or instructors.
- Illnesses may include...communicable and other infectious diseases from insects, animals, or people such as diarrhea, flu-like or respiratory illness, and other debilitating or life-threatening conditions including COVID-19 and other diseases caused by coronaviruses.

The NOLS Wilderness Medicine On-Course Student Information Form/Policies & Procedures has been updated to include a new policy:

- Participate fully in NOLS Wilderness Medicine's strategies to decrease the risk of infectious disease spread in our classrooms.

Illness Prior to or During a Course

What happens if I get sick before my course?

If you are confirmed or suspected as having COVID-19 in the 10 days prior to your course, please follow the [CDC's guidelines](#) for isolation and for determining when you can end isolation. In alignment with our [Cancellation Policy](#), we will not refund or transfer any students who are unable to attend a course within the cancellation deadline. We strongly recommend the purchase of trip insurance which includes coverage for COVID-19. While there is a range of available Tuition Protection and Travel Insurance providers, our preferred provider is [Aon Affinity](#). Please read each policy carefully and discuss any questions with a policy specialist at the provider you select.

What happens if I get sick or test positive during my course?

If you become ill or test positive for COVID-19 during your course or your instructor asks you not to attend class based on screening, you should seek medical advice. Based on the medical advice you receive you may or may not be able to continue with your course. NOLS will evaluate each situation and work with you and the course sponsor to assist you. We strongly recommend the purchase of trip insurance which includes coverage for COVID-19. While there is a range of available Tuition Protection and Travel Insurance providers, our preferred provider is [Aon Affinity](#). Please read each policy carefully and discuss any questions with a policy specialist at the provider you select.

What happens if I am exposed to someone with COVID-19 shortly before or during my course?

If you have close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you will need to obtain a COVID-19 test between days 5-7 after your last contact. You will need to wear a mask at all times until receiving negative test results. If negative, you may continue the course with regular precautions. If positive and it is prior to your course do not travel to your NOLS course. If your result comes back positive on-course, you will need to leave the course to begin your isolation.

We strongly recommend the purchase of trip insurance which includes coverage for COVID-19. While there is a range of available Tuition Protection and Travel Insurance providers, our preferred provider is [Aon Affinity](#). Please read each policy carefully and discuss any questions with a policy specialist at the provider you select.

What happens if a course member tests positive for COVID-19 during my course?

If a student or instructor tests positive for COVID-19 during your course, that individual will be separated from the course and directed to seek medical advice and begin isolation. Though each situation will be evaluated independently, NOLS will endeavor to continue the course for the remainder of the students.

If NOLS cancels the remainder of the course, we will work with students to prorate a tuition refund. If a student chooses to leave a course NOLS decides to continue, no tuition will be refunded. NOLS is not responsible for expenses related to a course impacted by a positive COVID-19 test.

What if I have more questions?

Please contact us at wilderness_medicine@nols.edu or 866-831-9001.