

NOLS Wilderness Medicine COVID-19 Disclosure, Practices and Expectations for Students



The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic raises 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 requirements, testing, 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

All students are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 on all U.S.-based NOLS Wilderness Medicine courses beginning in November 2021. Any COVID-19 vaccine approved by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) is an acceptable vaccine for the purposes of this policy.

Compliance will be required on the following timeline:

- Students on courses beginning **before November 1, 2021** will be subject to our current vaccination or testing policy. For more information, see [Appendix A](#).
- Students on courses beginning **between November 1 and November 11, 2021** must have received the final vaccine dose prior to arrival at their course. Students on these courses who have not completed their two week waiting period after receiving their final dose must submit a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of the course start.

- Students on courses that **begin on or after November 12, 2021** need to be two weeks or more past receiving the final vaccine dose prior to arrival at their course.

Wilderness Medicine instructors will review student vaccination cards at the start of the course.

Exemption requests in the categories noted below will be reviewed.

Exemptions

- Disability or documented medical contraindications to vaccines may allow an individual to be exempt from this requirement. Please see the procedure section below.
- Sincerely held religious beliefs, practices or observances that preclude vaccination may allow an individual to be exempt from this requirement. Please see the procedure section below.
- No exemption will be granted for students on WEMT courses due to healthcare facility requirements.

If granted an exemption, students will need to submit a negative PCR or antigen test taken within 72 hours of the course start, and students will be required to wear a KN95 mask at all times during the course. On Wilderness Medicine classroom courses longer than five days, students will need to obtain and submit a rapid COVID-19 test taken on day 6. NOLS will not provide these tests.

Please see [Appendix B](#) at the end of this document for the Exemption Request Procedure.

What do you mean by “within 72 hours of the course start date”?

Earliest Test Day	Course Start Day
Friday	Monday
Saturday	Tuesday
Sunday	Wednesday
Monday	Thursday
Tuesday	Friday
Wednesday	Saturday
Thursday	Sunday

What if I have already had COVID-19, do I still need to get vaccinated?

- Yes. Though having had COVID-19 in the past conveys limited protection, NOLS still requires students to be fully vaccinated prior to their course start date.

Please contact wilderness_medicine@nols.edu or 866-831-9001 during business hours if you need further guidance.

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

Students on Wilderness EMT courses will take additional COVID-19 tests during their course.

COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Strategy

In addition to requiring vaccinations, NOLS has instituted a 5 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. You should also review [this video](#) to visualize our practices.

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 monitor and assess all participants daily. You will be expected to check in each morning, answer questions regarding symptoms, and have your temperature checked.

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 than pre-existing allergies), abdominal discomfort (nausea/diarrhea), muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell.
- A temperature of over 100.4F/38C.
- In the past 14 days have been in close contact with someone suspected or confirmed as having COVID-19. If a healthcare provider, in the past 14 days, has been in close contact with someone suspected or confirmed as having COVID-19 without wearing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

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:

- Bring a cloth or surgical mask for use before and after class.
- Wear a provided KN95 mask when required. Assume this will be at all times during educational activities and short breaks. You will protect, isolate, and rotate the masks provided to you.
- Wear the provided gloves when in contact with another person.

- Bring eye protection (sunglasses and safety glasses are ok) to wear when working in close contact with other participants.

Distancing and Outdoor Classes: When feasible, physical distancing will be practiced and activities involving student contact will be conducted outdoors.

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 screening.

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.

What if I have a mask exemption card or letter?

We recognize that wearing a face-covering or mask for extended periods of time is not feasible for everyone. However, mask usage is an integral part of our risk reduction strategy. If you are unable to tolerate wearing a mask for up to four hours at a time, you should delay your attendance until your condition changes or the requirement is removed.

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.

What should I be aware of while traveling to my course?

We request that you take steps to limit your exposure for 14 days prior to and while traveling to your course. This includes practicing physical (social) distancing, wearing a mask or face covering when in public or when physical distancing is not possible, frequent hand washing, and monitoring your health for symptoms of COVID-19.

Illness Prior to or During a Course

What happens if I get sick before my course?

Do not travel to your NOLS course if you have COVID-19 symptoms (cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell), have in the past 14 days been in close contact with someone suspected or confirmed as having COVID-19, or you are confirmed or suspected as having COVID-19 in the past 10 days. We will work with you to transfer your enrollment to a later course.

What happens if I get sick during my course?

If you become ill 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 either prorate a tuition refund or to assist you in finishing your course at a later time.

What happens if I am exposed to someone with COVID-19 while not wearing course-level PPE?

If you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and you were not wearing your full course-level PPE, you will need to remove yourself from the course and seek medical advice. This contact might occur outside of class hours, or during breaks in the course. You will likely need to begin quarantine and will not be able to continue with your course. NOLS will evaluate each situation and work with you and the course sponsor to either prorate a tuition refund or to assist you in finishing your course at a later time. NOLS is not responsible for expenses related to a positive COVID-19 test.

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. Our medical advisors support this strategy based on the level of personal protective equipment used during our courses.

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.

Appendix A

Vaccination or Negative COVID-19 Test Requirement for courses before November 1, 2021

A negative COVID-19 test result is required on courses greater than three days in length. It is not required for Wilderness First Aid, Wilderness First Responder Recertification/Hybrid Recertification, or Wilderness Medicine for the Professional Practitioner.

To participate in a Wilderness Advanced First Aid, Wilderness First Responder/Hybrid WFR, Wilderness Upgrade for Medical Professionals, Wilderness Medicine Expedition, or Medicine in the Wild course, upon arrival you must provide verification of a negative COVID-19 test administered no more than 5 days prior to the course start date, or verification of full vaccination (see below for details). COVID-19 molecular or NAAT (includes PCR) tests are preferred, but COVID-19 Antigen tests are acceptable. The results of a COVID-19 antibody test are not acceptable. Students who arrive without proof of a negative test result (or verification of full vaccination) will not be allowed to participate in the course.

WEMT students do not need a pre-course COVID-19 test. They do need a COVID vaccination (see below).

What do you mean by “5 days prior to the course start date”?

Earliest Test Day	Course Start Day
Wednesday	Monday
Thursday	Tuesday
Friday	Wednesday
Saturday	Thursday
Sunday	Friday
Monday	Saturday
Tuesday	Sunday

What if I have received the COVID-19 vaccination, do I still need to provide a negative test result?

No. Unless the course sponsor or an applicable government entity requires otherwise, if you have been fully vaccinated (two weeks after receiving the final dose of any COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the World Health Organization) and are asymptomatic, you may provide verification of your vaccination in lieu of a negative COVID-19 test result. If you do not wish to share your vaccination status, you may provide a negative COVID-19 test result instead (see above for details). Though it is strongly encouraged, NOLS does not require COVID-19 vaccination to participate in our programs.

Do I need to get the COVID-19 vaccination if my course begins before November 1, 2021?

If you are taking a WEMT course, yes. Our clinical partners have started requiring the COVID-19 vaccine for anyone visiting their facilities. WEMT students need to submit proof of being two weeks past the final dose of any COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the World Health Organization prior to arriving for their WEMT course. Students without the COVID-19 vaccination will not be eligible for the WEMT course.

What if I cannot find a COVID-19 test in my area?

If you live in the United States, NOLS recommends you order a test from Vault Health. These tests can be administered at home under video supervision. The sample is returned using prepaid expedited shipping and results are delivered electronically within 48-72 hours after the sample is received. If you choose a Vault test, please ensure you order the test at minimum 1 full week before the first day of your course, to ensure sufficient time to receive, take, and return the test, and receive your results before the first day of your course.

In addition, you may be able to find regional COVID-19 tests through CVS, Walgreens, or LHI. Please contact the course sponsor to learn about local testing options.

What if I can't get test results in the prescribed time window?

You will not be allowed to participate in your course without a negative COVID-19 test result. You may be able to find a rapid COVID-19 testing site near the course location and join the course late. However, if you miss more than 10% of the course hours, you will not be eligible for certification.

What if I have already had COVID-19, do I still need to get provide a test result?

Maybe.

- If you were diagnosed with COVID-19 more than 90 days prior to the course start date, you must provide a negative COVID-19 test result to participate.
- If you were diagnosed with COVID-19 between 90 and 14 days before the course start date you will need to bring proof of your positive test result or documentation from a health care provider stating a diagnosis of COVID-19 in lieu of a negative test result.
- If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the past 14 days you must delay your course participation.

What if I can't afford a test?

Free testing is available in many places and some health insurance plans also cover testing.

What if my COVID-19 test is positive?

If your test result is positive, do not travel to your course. Please contact the organization you registered with to assess your options. If you registered directly with NOLS Wilderness Medicine please contact us at wilderness_medicine@nols.edu or 866-831-9001 during business hours.

Appendix B**Exemption Request Procedures for Medical or Religious Reasons**

Students seeking an exemption from this policy due to a medical reason, or because of a sincerely held religious belief, must submit a completed Request for Accommodation form to wilderness_medicine@nols.edu to begin the review process. Requests must be submitted not later than 28 days prior to the course start date.

[Download Exemption Request Forms](#)

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