

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, and on select international courses, beginning in November 2021. Fully vaccinated means to be two weeks or more past receiving the final vaccine dose prior to arrival at the course. Any COVID-19 vaccine approved by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) is an acceptable vaccine for the purposes of this policy. We strongly recommend that students who are eligible should also receive a COVID-19 booster shot.

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.
- All Exemption Requests are granted only for the specified course and associated dates. Each course requires a separate exemption request.

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 A](#) 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.

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, as appropriate.

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.
- If you have been in close contact (within 6 feet of someone for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period) with someone who has COVID-19, unless you have been fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated is to be two weeks or more past receiving the final vaccine dose. Fully vaccinated people should get tested 5-7 days after their exposure, even if they don't have symptoms and wear a mask indoors in public for 10 days following exposure or until their test result is negative.

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 directed by your instructors.
- Bring eye protection (sunglasses and safety glasses are ok) to wear when working in close contact with other participants, as directed by your instructors.

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.

If you have access to a rapid antigen test, we recommend that you take one as close to the start of your course as possible to minimize the chance of traveling with an active case 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) 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 assist you in finishing your course at a later time.

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

If you are a vaccinated person who has been in 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 will work with you to transfer your enrollment to a later course.

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

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. Please fill out either the medical exemption form or the religious exemption form depending on your request. Requests must be submitted no later than **35 days prior** to the course start date. All Exemption Requests are granted only for the specified course and associated dates. Each course requires a separate exemption request.

Exemption Request Forms

[Medical Exemption Request Form](#)

[Religious Exemption Request Form](#)

To download the form click the above link, once on the *Exemption Request Forms* document select File → Download → Microsoft Word (.docx).

Requests must be submitted no later than **35 days prior** to the course start date.