

# NOLS Wilderness Medicine Classroom Expanded Practices for the COVID-19 Pandemic



The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic raises questions about health and risk management while attending wilderness medicine courses. NOLS Wilderness Medicine has always had curriculum and practices in place to educate students and to reduce the risk of disease transmission. These standard infection control practices not only help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 viral illnesses, but also more common viruses, such as the flu. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic we, like all of healthcare education, are reviewing and expanding both our classroom practices and curriculum. In this process we are relying on respected resources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and colleagues in wilderness medicine and EMS educational programs.

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. We will implement strategies to further mitigate the risk of disease transmission associated with physical proximity, but we cannot eliminate it.

Below is a list of practices that will be implemented in our classrooms. This list is a baseline of what will be done, it is possible that local restrictions or requirements may require modifications to these practices and those will be considered and implemented on a course by course basis.

## Classroom Selection

Choosing an appropriate classroom for the course is the first step in setting up a class for success. The more space available, the better students will be able to physically distance. Our recommendation for classroom sizes are as follows:

- For classrooms greater than 1200 square feet: 25-30 students are appropriate
- For classrooms between 900 and 1200 square feet: 21-24 students are appropriate
- For classrooms between 700 and 900 square feet: 15-20 students are appropriate

See Appendix A for more details around this information.

## Pre-course Communication

Prior to the course, students receive information about the nature of the educational experience and the risks involved. They are asked to sign a Student Agreement that outlines these risks. Additionally, students are asked to bring certain elements of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) with them in order to participate.

- All students are requested to bring: masks, glasses/goggles.
- Participants\* are asked to be diligent with hygiene while traveling to the course.
- Participants are asked to monitor their health before the course and not attend if they have signs of sickness. (Appendix B)

\*"Participants" refers to both Instructors and Students on a course.

## During the Course

### General Practices

- Participants should avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Participants should stay home if displaying any symptoms of illness (Appendix B).
- Participants should cover their cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. If tissues are not available, they should cough or sneeze into the crook of their elbow.
- Participants should not share phones, water bottles, pens, and other commonly touched objects.

### Hand Sanitization (Appendix C)

- Hands should be sanitized or washed before entering and after leaving the classroom.
- Hands should be sanitized or washed before and after physical contact.

### PPE

- Masks (surgical or fabric) will be worn in class.
- Masks, glasses/goggles and gloves will be worn during physical contact.
- Gloves are not required when at desks during lectures. Use hand hygiene instead.
- Glove use is always preceded by and followed with hand hygiene.
- Masks should be changed daily and not reused without washing.

### Surface Cleaning (Appendix D)

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces with a commercial or household cleaning spray or wipe. This should happen after every 4 hour teaching block.
- Disinfect spaces prior to eating and after eating, etc.

### Cleaning Gear

- Fabric items will be laundered between courses as appropriate to the item and usage. Other gear & sleeping bags will be wiped down with disinfecting wipes between use.

### Health Assessment

- All participants will be formally evaluated daily for cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell in the past 24 hours.
- All participants will have their temperature measured via NCIT (Infrared thermometer) device.
  - If temperature exceeds 100.4F/38C then a second reading via an oral thermometer is required. If temperature still exceeds 100.4F/38C the participant will be refused entry and told to seek medical care.

## Response to Non-Compliance

- Refusal to comply with enhanced hygiene practices is grounds for dismissal from the course.

## Return to class for previously ill participants

- Return to class is likely unrealistic. Recovery time and test availability may preclude return to course.
- The CDC Criteria for return to work for healthcare providers will be the guideline.
  - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and,

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- At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

## **Appendix A - Wilderness Medicine COVID-19 Classroom Size Considerations**

Historically, NOLS Wilderness Medicine has recommended that classes with a maximum enrollment of thirty students necessitate an indoor classroom of at least 1200 square feet (30'x40')\* with climate-control and a large whiteboard. Given the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) current recommendations for physical distancing when feasible, we are updating our recommendations for classroom sizes as they relate to enrollment. We expect these recommendations to be in place for the foreseeable future.

For classrooms greater than 1200 square feet\*: 25-30 students are appropriate

For classrooms between 900 and 1200 square feet\*: 21-24 students are appropriate

For classrooms between 700 and 900 square feet\*: 15-20 students are appropriate

For a 1200 square foot classroom, [we have put together this schematic](#) showing you a possible classroom set up for 24 students. We would encourage you to create similar outlines (even with just pen and paper) to help you determine how to best arrange your classroom.

We understand that seating capacity with appropriate distancing is not only a factor of square footage but also is impacted by room dimensions, obstructions like posts and pillars, as well as the functionality of any furniture in the room. Additional factors, such as ventilation, adjoining rooms, and spaces both indoor and outdoor that allow for spreading out frequently for activities can impact the usability of the space.

Strategies to maximize physical distancing in the classroom:

- Reserve spaces that are large, well-ventilated and have removable furniture.
- Reserve additional adjacent break-out spaces or outdoor covered pavilions
- Remove any unnecessary furniture from the space
- Assign an attached space for the storage of gear and supplies freeing up space in the classroom
- Set up space with a combination of tables/chairs and chairs only
- Set up space with chairs only and inform students to bring a clipboard or lapdesk
- Set up space with low camp-style chairs and/or suggest that students bring a low profile chair with them
- Provide a portable whiteboard or flipchart that will allow for frequent outdoor instruction

The CDC guides us to select a gathering space that is feasible, practical, and acceptable under local restrictions. A member of the Wilderness Medicine Program team will be reaching out to you to discuss your classroom situation and collaborate with you to confirm whether dropping the capacity on your course is advisable.

Thank you for working with us during these evolving times.

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## **FAQ's**

### **What are the corresponding metric measurements?**

- 30' x 40' = 10 x 13 meters
- 1200 square feet = 112 square meters
- 900 square feet = 83 square meters
- 700 square feet = 65 square meters

### **Will there be adjustments in the pricing model in anticipation of smaller class sizes due to the restricted physical space of classrooms?**

There are no plans for adjusted pricing or lowering the thresholds to receive free tuition spots on a course. NOLS Wilderness Medicine understands that capping the number of students/course due to classroom size will impact financial margins for both parties. Like many businesses, NOLS is incurring additional costs related to PPE in order to operate under new recommendations. With the exception of the WFR Recert course, NOLS will be absorbing these expenses without increasing student pricing to Sponsors. Groups of thirty can still be accommodated in the appropriately sized classroom.

### **Do classrooms need to be set up with 6 feet (2 meters) or more distancing between each student?**

Classrooms should meet the size standards listed above and then use space as effectively as possible to physically distance the students while seated. Separation of 6 feet is the goal, and at times may not be possible. Masks will be worn at all times in the classroom as the strict maintenance of physical distancing is not feasible given the practical nature of first aid training.

### **Why are there square foot ranges? Is there a strict ratio of space per student?**

Ranges allow for consideration of different shaped classrooms, presence of immovable furniture, and obstructions such as pillars. The risk of disease transmission increases as the classrooms become more congested.

### **How does operating during the pandemic impact my liability insurance?**

You should speak with your insurance provider for specific answers. Some states have been passing legislation to protect business from liability during this time. It is also important to recognize that there are inherent risks that cannot be eliminated during this time.

- There is a risk of contracting COVID-19 on a course.
- NOLS has adapted its practices to mitigate that risk using information known at the time from reliable resources such as the CDC.
- NOLS includes COVID-19 as an inherent risk in its student agreement.
- NOLS and sponsors share liability and have mutual indemnity language in our contracts.

## **Appendix B - Evaluation of an Ill Student or Staff Person**

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Students and Instructors should not attend class if sick. If you are ill before your course, contact the NOLS Wilderness Medicine office. If you are ill during the course, inform your instructors. In this case you may be asked to leave.

If the student or instructor has any of the following, they 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
- In contact with anyone who has COVID-19 over the last 14 days?

### **Appendix C - Hand Hygiene**

- Students and instructors should perform hand hygiene using either soap and water for at least 20 seconds or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available and at a minimum:
  - Beginning and end of major class sessions (morning, afternoon, evening)
  - Gloves should be worn in all scenarios and practical skills sessions. Hand hygiene with hand sanitizer should be done before putting on and after removing gloves.

### **Appendix D - Cleaning Surfaces**

- Dirty surfaces should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
  - Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims are expected to be effective against SARS-CoV-2 based on data for viruses that are hard to disintegrate. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). In the absence of EPA-approved products, products with label claims against human coronaviruses or other viruses should be used according to label instructions.
  - For soft (porous) surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes, clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. After cleaning:
    - Launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting and dry completely or use products with the EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims that are suitable for porous surfaces.

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