

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND DRINKING WATER BRANCH

EHS Circular Letter #2020-31

TO: Directors of Health
Chief Sanitarians

FROM: Lori J. Mathieu, Branch Chief

Handwritten signature of Lori J. Mathieu in blue ink, dated 2020.

DATE: May 19, 2020

SUBJECT: Beaches and Swimming Areas – COVID 19 Guidance

The purpose of this Circular Letter is to provide information to directors of health and chief sanitarians regarding COVID-19 and the use of freshwater or saltwater for swimming as many beaches and swimming areas are scheduled to open Memorial Day Weekend.

In response to a request for information regarding COVID-19 and swimming, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) informed the Department of Public Health (DPH) that, at this time, it is not aware of cases of COVID-19 caused by the recreational use of either freshwater or saltwater for swimming. DPH also conducted research and came to the same conclusion as the CDC. Testing for COVID-19 in recreational waters at swimming areas is not recommended at this time. Routine testing to determine the safety of the recreation water that is routinely conducted throughout the swimming season is adequate for protecting public health.

Both DPH and CDC find that complying with social distancing and face covering requirements while on the beach are very important in reducing the potential risk of contracting COVID-19. Therefore, during this public health emergency, DPH recommends that everyone adhere to federal and state guidance regarding COVID-19, including [CDC "social distancing" guidance](#), Governor Ned Lamont's [executive orders](#), including [Executive Order 7BB](#), which requires any person in a public place in Connecticut who is unable to or does not maintain a safe social distance of approximately six feet from every other person to cover their mouth and nose with a mask or cloth face-covering, and [DECD's guidance](#) regarding "Stay Safe, Stay Home". In addition, if individuals are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because they are aged 65 years or older or because they have a serious long-term health problem, it is particularly important for them to take actions to reduce their risk of getting sick with the disease: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/COVID19-What-You-Can-Do-High-Risk.pdf>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact DPH's Recreation Program at (860) 509-7334.

c: Heather Aaron, MPH, LNHA, Deputy Commissioner, DPH
Brian Toal, Acting Section Chief, Environmental Health Section, DPH



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Dear Municipal Officials:

As we approach the Memorial Day Holiday and the start of the summer recreation season, I am writing to share the latest Operational Plan for Connecticut State Parks and Boat Launches, which provides current guidelines for DEEP staff and visitors for the operation and use of Connecticut state park grounds, trails, beaches, boat launches and other areas in a manner that is consistent with social distancing guidelines.

Coordination is more important now than ever as we respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic. This collaboration strengthens our ability to provide outdoor recreation opportunities to an estimated 10 million annual visitors to Connecticut State Parks. The recent calls and discussions with Council of Government members and municipal leaders have been very informative for the development of our Operational Plan. Hopefully our Plan will be informative to you as you manage your beaches, parks, and other recreation facilities.

We developed this latest Operational Plan in consultation with the CT Department of Public Health (DPH), and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Red Cross. The guidance addresses topics that may be relevant for the operation of municipal beaches and other outdoor recreation areas. The guidance also includes links to DPH guidance.

The full plan is available here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/COVID-19-Updates-CT-State-Parks-and-Forests>. Outlined below are a few highlights of the plan:

Shoreline beaches in Connecticut state parks will be open. Governor Lamont recently announced that in Connecticut, state parks that feature beaches along the Connecticut shoreline will be open May 22, though with capacity limitations, and visitors are advised to follow social distancing guidelines.

Swimming areas at all inland State Parks will be closed indefinitely. Based on the very limited size of inland swim areas and the large groups that will congregate on the beach and in the water we are prohibiting all swimming at inland State Parks. We will continue to review this policy in alignment with public health recommendations and will consider the reopening of designated swim areas on a case by case basis.

Social distancing is actively monitored and enforced. This includes a “**No Picnicking**” policy prohibiting use of picnic tables, and **no gatherings over five**. At beaches, we are recommending that visitors space beach blankets 15 feet apart.

Lower Capacity daily closures of parks and forests will continue. Parks and forests have been evaluated as to whether their pre-existing parking capacities can be utilized while assuring proper social distancing. Most park areas can accommodate that pre-existing maximum parking capacity, but additional visitors parking outside of a facility and walking in cannot be allowed. Some areas (mostly larger shoreline parks) are operating on a

reduced parking capacity level of as little as 25% of the total parking capacity, based on facility usage at the time. Parking capacity targets have been established for those areas based on a variety of factors, including:

- Daily observations of the number of cars and the quality of social distancing at peak times
- The size and characteristics of the park, including potential concentrations of visitors in certain areas (beaches, boardwalks, bike paths) based on facility usage at the time
- The potential for additional visitors to walk in to a park, eg., from adjacent neighborhoods or beaches

Additional tools that can be utilized to set capacity limits include surveys and GIS overlay, and for saltwater beaches, consideration of high tides. For reference, DEEP assumes an average of 3 visitors per vehicle.

Amenities at State Parks are scaled back. Bathrooms and bathhouses may be closed at many locations, subject to our capacity to keep them clean and safe consistent with DPH and CDC guidance. **Indoor spaces**, such as nature centers, remain closed. **Pavilions and playscapes** are off limits. **Boardwalks may be closed** where social distancing is difficult.

Lifeguards will not be on shoreline beaches in Connecticut state parks early in the season. These beaches are currently posted as "No Lifeguards on Duty". It is expected that shoreline beaches will begin lifeguarding when adequate staffing, training, and safety practices meeting DEEP standards are in place. **Lifeguards will be provided training to reduce the risk of virus transmission in the course of their duties, including providing CPR. DEEP will be utilizing guidance for lifeguards available from the American Red Cross.**

Our staff must wear face coverings at all times they are interacting with the public, and the public must comply with Gov. Lamont's Executive Order to wear face coverings when social distancing of 6' or more is not possible.

Communication is critical. Part of the success of a lower capacity operational approach hinges on educating the public to choose weekday or early morning visit times, and to check DEEP @CTStateParks Twitter account for real-time updates on daily closures. **DEEP is working on a new website to include information on local park, boat launch, and beach closures.** More to follow on this initiative!

It is important to note that these measures are designed for State Parks, and municipalities are free to implement reopening strategies that work best for your natural spaces and facilities, within the parameters of Governor Lamont's Executive Orders and the state's reopening guidance. We are hopeful that by sharing this plan with you, you can adapt any practices that suit your needs. We welcome the opportunity for continued collaboration and sharing of best practices as we navigate this unusual summer recreation season together.

Sincerely,



Katie S. Dykes
Commissioner