




United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

April 3, 2020

Memorandum

To: Deputy Director, Operations Exercising the Authority of the Director

From: Director, Office of Public Health, Epidemiology Branch Chief, One Health Coordinator 

Subject: Public Health Recommendations Related to COVID-19

Only days ago, the President issued a 30-day extension of COVID-19 guidelines to slow the rapid spread of virus throughout our Nation. The National Park Service has a critical role to support this effort. As public health professionals assigned to the National Park Service, our highest priorities are to protect visitor and workforce health and ensure adherence to our congressional mandates, including allowing for public enjoyment of these resources we work so hard to protect. The COVID-19 global pandemic challenges our ability to accomplish these priorities in unison. Continued NPS visitation not only threatens our workforce, but uniquely enhances COVID-19 risks in the neighboring communities and visitors and increases the risk of negative outcomes for all.

During this time of uncertainty, we cannot predict the exact burden of disease that our workforce and parks will see as the COVID-19 pandemic runs its course, but we can say with absolute certainty that leaving our parks open to the public when social distancing is not being practiced, onboarding employees originating from throughout the country and world, and permitting significant shared housing environments will result in a significantly greater burden of disease and death than if we had taken the proactive measure to continue to close these parks and/or limit operations. Therefore, the Office of Public Health recommends the following actions to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in parks:

- For at least 30 days, take appropriate actions to restrict new employees, volunteers, partners, and concessioners from coming into the park to the greatest extent possible because of the risk they present in transmitting disease to the park community.
- Stop dormitory-like housing at this time. Consistent with actions taken well before the disease had spread to every state in our nation, colleges and universities vacated dorms where the risk of rapid spread of infection is high.
- Restrict park access in communities where there are stay-at-home orders where large numbers of visitors travel distances to visit parks and mitigation measures to maintain social distancing are not able to be enforced.

We recognize these recommendations significantly impact and delay park operations for the upcoming season and many other factors must be considered when planning to meet the mission and goals of a park. These steps are intended to protect our national treasures, the NPS family that is dedicated to their preservation, and the health and safety of our nation. The National Park Service Office of Public Health will continue to be available to help parks meet their goals in the safest way possible.

Cc: Acting Deputy Director, Operations
Deputy Director, Management and Administration
Acting Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection