



Mask-Wearing for NPS Commercial Visitor Service Providers and Partners

Updated March 2, 2021

Purpose

This bulletin provides information for commercial visitor service providers (concessioners, commercial use authorization holders, and leaseholders) and other partners (e.g., cooperating associations, friends groups and authorized philanthropic partners, education partners, volunteer groups, and others), referred to collectively throughout this document as “partners,” on National Park Service (NPS) requirements to wear masks to protect employees and visitors in units of the National Park System and to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Background

On January 20, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order No. 13991: [Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#) setting a clear goal of halting the spread of COVID-19 by relying on the best available data and science, which includes wearing masks while around others, maintaining physical distancing from others whenever possible, and adhering to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The order, [subsequent guidance issued by the Office of Management and Budget](#) on January 24, 2021 (OMB Memorandum M-21-15), and the [Protecting Our Workforce by Requiring Mask Wearing](#) memorandum from the Acting Secretary of Interior, dated January 29, 2021, clearly articulate that one of the paramount concerns driving implementation is to protect the health and safety of federal employees and their families, federal contractors, partners, volunteers, and the public.

The NPS is working to implement the executive order and accompanying federal guidance through a combination of administrative actions and revised policy documents. Wearing a mask demonstrates NPS and partner commitments to public health for our visitors and communities. Servicewide policy on mask wearing was issued to all NPS employees and superintendents on February 2, 2021. Superintendents may incorporate more stringent state or local mask-wearing requirements into a park's COVID-19 response posture if appropriate.

General Requirements for Mask Wearing

All individuals over the age of two years must wear masks in indoor common areas and shared workspaces and in outdoor areas where physical distancing cannot be reasonably maintained. This includes NPS partners, employees, contractors, volunteers, and visitors.

Masks must [cover the nose and mouth](#), and [meet CDC and OSHA guidance](#). The NPS will not allow novelty/non-protective masks, masks with ventilation valves, face shields as a substitute for masks, or masks with messages or graphics that the NPS prohibits. Additionally, *masks are not a substitute for physical distancing*; even masked partner staff should maintain physical distancing from their colleagues and the public.

Masks must be worn indoors in common areas and shared workspaces in federal buildings including facilities used by partners (e.g., public areas such as lodge lobbies and hallways, ticket offices, visitor information desks, theaters, and retail stores) as well as employee areas such as shared offices, kitchens, maintenance buildings, and warehouses. There are exceptional circumstances under which a mask may not be required indoors, such as when an individual is alone in a room with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, when in private areas of partner housing units, or when actively eating or drinking in a restaurant or employee dining room while maintaining physical distance in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Masks are also required in outdoor areas on federal property where physical distancing cannot reasonably be maintained. For example, a mask may not be required for the entire hike on a trail or on a lodge walkway but must be used when passing others on the trail or the walkway. A mask must also be used or at times when physical distancing cannot be maintained in a guided group.

Implementing Requirements for Partners

Superintendents will update their compendiums of park regulations to include mask-wearing and other requirements and will communicate these requirements to their partners.

Partners must update or incorporate mask-wearing procedures that meet the requirements for mask wearing, as set out above, into their COVID-19 management plans. Partners must share and discuss this plan with their park superintendent or their designee. As part of their COVID-19 management plans, NPS partners may have their own internal policies on mask-wearing and other public health measures for their employees when in NPS buildings or on NPS lands. These may be more, but not less, stringent than those of the NPS.

If a partner employee is unable to wear a mask properly or cannot tolerate a mask, the NPS will consider [adaptations and alternatives](#) on a case-by-case basis. There may also be special circumstances where mask wearing may present a safety hazard (e.g., indoor recreational activities such as indoor swimming pools and outdoor recreation activities such as whitewater rafting). Partners must discuss these situations with park superintendents or their designees to determine acceptable alternatives before implementing any deviations from the NPS requirements.

The NPS will work collaboratively with its partners to understand and implement NPS requirements and to resolve any challenges that might arise. NPS law enforcement rangers will enforce mask wearing requirements as necessary. Failure of a partner to comply could be reflected in the partner's performance evaluations and could, if unresolved, result in suspension or revocation of the partner's authorization.

Implementing Guidelines for Visitors

Public health includes the health of our park visitors. Superintendents will update their compendiums of park regulations to implement and enforce mask-wearing requirements for visitors in federal buildings and on federal lands including those assigned to partners. Partners should consult with their park superintendents if they have any questions on these requirements.

Partners providing services to visitors must require visitors to follow the requirements for mask wearing outlined above. Partners, as independent businesses and organizations, may deny service to visitors or take other measures consistent with private sector business practices if, after encouragement, the visitor does not comply. Partners must coordinate with the park to address any issues that cannot be resolved including any enforcement issues. A [de-escalation toolkit](#) is available to partners who engage with visitors in parks and visitor centers. Partner policies and procedures for visitor engagement on mask-wearing should be part of their COVID-19 management plans.

To support implementation of the mask guidance, partners may consult with park staff regarding signage plans. When printing or ordering park signs, park staff have been asked to work with the park's partners to determine if they also need signs for shared public areas so that these signs can be included in the print order at the partner's expense. Partners can also align their own signage with language used in NPS COVID-19 signs.

For Further Information

If partners have any questions or concerns regarding this guidance on wearing masks, they should consult with their applicable point of contact as outlined in their authorization or agreement. NPS will continue to provide information to its partners as additional guidance is developed.