

The Sedona Westerners is opening up the 2020 season registration. This promises to be a challenging season as we navigate the new COVID-19 risks. Please register via the website.

The Sedona Westerners season will be kicking off with a September program via Zoom. Instructions on how to log in to attend will be provided shortly. Our October picnic is cancelled, and instead is replaced with a zoom meeting in the evening.

Dr Curt Kommer has provided an updated summary regarding COVID-19. After reading this, and all of the information previously provided, please contact myself or Dr Kommer if you have further questions.

Hike bosses still have hikes they need leaders and/or co-leaders for. If you feel comfortable leading a hike, please help them out. I'm sure that they would be willing to switch hikes if there is something that you would be comfortable leading that isn't on their schedule, and is appropriate to the group. You can contact any of the hike bosses via the website.

The Sedona Westerners leadership still hopes to begin organized hiking in October but, as you all know, each day brings changes, surprises, and uncertainty in the COVID-19 world. As we wait to see what happens, Trail Boss Terri Petrescu thought this might be a good time to address some of the questions and concerns that members may have regarding the resumption of Club activities. Please refer to the information that the Westerner Board has already provided for details regarding protocols and recommendations.

Let's go through some of the issues:

How does COVID-19 spread?

It is a respiratory virus, spread through the air by infected people coughing, sneezing, talking, singing, etc. The virus infects by entering through our nose, mouth, and perhaps eyes, but not through skin. It is very rarely spread from surfaces or objects, which can happen only if a person touches an infected surface and immediately touches their nose, mouth, or eyes.

How to approach hiking with the Westerners in the COVID-19 era?

This will be a personal choice for each member, like many of the other risk v. benefit choices we make every day (shopping, church, school, exercise, voting, dining-out, traveling).

"HIKE AT YOUR OWN RISK" is based on the following:

- NO environment or activity is completely safe from COVID-19. Every restriction, precaution, and guideline that we follow are, at best, attempts to REDUCE risk. As long as the virus is with us the risk CANNOT be eliminated.
- Each person must assess their own personal COVID-19 risk, the risk to those around them, and their individual willingness to accept a certain degree of risk when participating in Westerner activities.
- **DO NOT** hike if you are having fever or other flu-like symptoms.
- **DO NOT** participate in Westerners group activities if you have the following conditions:
 1. Chronic lung disease or moderate-severe asthma
 2. Serious heart conditions such as Congestive Heart Failure
 3. Poorly controlled Diabetes
 4. Serious liver or kidney disease
 5. Immune disorders such as cancer, cancer treatment, organ transplant, or if you are taking immune medications or steroids.

- Members with questions about any of the above conditions, or other medical conditions, are encouraged to discuss their COVID-19 risk with their medical provider.
- **DO NOT** participate in Westerners activities for **two weeks** if:
 1. You have been exposed to a known COVID-19 infected person
 2. If you are newly arrived to Sedona, wait two weeks from the date you arrived before participating.
 3. You suspect that you may have been exposed during travel, or activities, that presented increased risk.

What are the COVID-19 risks of hiking with the Westerners?

Outdoor activities are comparatively safe. Studies have estimated that the risk of getting infected outdoors is dramatically lower than indoors, possibly up to 1/500th of the indoor risk. Hiking together with small groups of friends/neighbors while observing physical distancing is defined as a “low-risk” activity by the CDC, and currently encouraged by the American Hiking Society.

- **Hiking** in small groups (the CDC recommends 10 or less) while maintaining a physical distance of 6 feet should keep the risk relatively low. Distancing of 6 feet seems to be a safe compromise: the WHO continues to recommend only 3 feet, while some researchers have recommended up to 33 feet based on laboratory simulations. The CDC remains confident that 6 feet, especially outdoors (the virus doesn’t like heat, wind, or dryness), is sufficient.
- **Sign-In meetings** (pre-hike) present an increased risk because many times attendance is high and 6 feet of separation can be problematic. This risk can be reduced by requiring wearing masks at the sign-in meeting. The signing-in process itself will be designed to avoid having to share pens or common surfaces, and members should remember that this “touch-transfer” risk, while very small, can be effectively eliminated by the use of hand sanitizer during the process.
- **Carpooling** also presents a potential risk. The Club will not encourage carpooling during this time, but the realities are that it is sometimes convenient. The carpooling risk can be reduced by the Club’s recommendations of wearing masks, opening car windows, wiping down surfaces, liberal use of hand sanitizer, and limiting occupants to 4 per vehicle. Also, for extra safety, try to carpool only with people that you know and see regularly.

What can personally be done to reduce COVID-19 risk during Club hikes?

Hiking and socializing with friends can be a positive force during these times, adding to both our physical and emotional well-being. Our immune systems thrive on exercise and happiness. Maximize everyone’s safety when hiking with the Club by:

- **Avoiding Club activities when you feel ill.** The most common COVID-19 symptoms are fever, cough, and congestion, but fatigue, intestinal complaints, muscle aches, and other “flu-like” symptoms can be signals. To be safe, if you feel even a little sick it’s best to avoid group activities.
- **Wear a mask when proper distancing is difficult, and wear it properly.** Most homemade and purchased masks provide a small but definite protection (with the exception of bandannas , neck gaiters, and single-ply constructions like a handkerchief, which are largely ineffective). Masks that have elastic ear loops are inferior to those that are tied on. Microfiber masks such as N-95 masks, or surgical masks, provide the best protection. Make sure it fits the contours of your face. If you need to adjust your mask make sure that you don’t touch your face while doing

so, and sanitize your hands afterward. Best case scenario: wash your cloth face mask after each hike (CDC/How to wash a face covering), or replace a microfiber mask for each hike.

- **Try to maintain that 6 feet of separation, especially during breaks or pauses.** If members would feel safer wearing a mask while hiking or during breaks they are welcome to do so, but it will not be required as long as separation can be maintained. **Physical separation remains the single most effective method of infection prevention.** The CDC defines a “possible exposure” as being within 6 feet of an infected person for 15 minutes or more and, although there is some argument over this, it does provide some perspective on how we can avoid getting infected.
- If touching shared objects like straps or packs, or if helping another hiker with a wrist lock or a push, make sure you use **hand sanitizer** ASAP for best protection (recommended duration at least 30 seconds). If you have to cough or sneeze use your arm or a barrier cloth like a kerchief and follow-up with hand-sanitizer.

How will the Club decide if and when it is safe enough to start hiking?

AzDHS (Arizona Dept. of Health Services) continuously monitors COVID-19 caseloads and conditions across every county and town in Arizona and designates areas as Low, Moderate, or High Risk. Based on these statewide and local COVID-19 conditions and trends, and continuous input from AzDHS, both Governor Ducey and Sedona Mayor Moriarty continue to provide guidance and regulation in the form of Executive Orders. The Westerner leadership can monitor these changing conditions and recommendations and rely on this information to prudently decide when risk-levels and regulations might permit the start of Club hiking. Should conditions change for the worse, or if the Club has multiple hikers test positive for COVID-19, the Board can suspend organized hiking as necessary.

What about Westerners Meetings and Events?

The CDC provides guidelines and the State of Arizona provides regulations regarding meetings and events during COVID-19, and the Club will monitor these recommendations. Currently large gatherings (>50 people) are prohibited. When these restrictions are loosened the Westerner Board can consider resuming events and meetings, and the following strategies have been discussed to minimize risk:

- No guests from outside our local area
- Outdoor venues, if possible
- Physical distancing and face coverings for attendees
- No self-serve or buffet style refreshments, opting instead for “bring your own” or individually boxed or plated items
- Frequent cleaning of shared surfaces and plenty of hand sanitizer stations
- Avoidance of lines for sign-in, refreshments, bathrooms, etc.

What if a fellow hiker gets infected with COVID-19?

All participating members will be required to notify the Westerners leadership should they test positive for COVID-19. If a member does test positive they have the option to allow disclosing their name to the Club membership or, if they prefer, their identity will be kept confidential. Any infected member must avoid Westerners activities for a period of two weeks following their positive test, and only return if all symptoms have resolved.

All members will be notified via e-mail, and specific members that might be considered “at risk for exposure” (hiked in same group of ten, or carpooled, with the infected member) will be individually notified. Members deemed “at risk for exposure” will be required to avoid all Club activities for a period of two weeks and only return if they remain asymptomatic.

Should an active Westerner test COVID-positive, members identified as “at risk for exposure” (or any concerned member) will be urged to contact their healthcare provider and consider COVID-19 testing. This protocol may change depending on local COVID-19 trends and the Club’s experience.

What if I have more questions?

- [CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) (information on every aspect of Coronavirus prevention and risks)
- [AzDHS/coronavirus](https://www.azdhs.gov/coronavirus) (specific AZ information including current state and county restrictions)
- Members are urged to contact their healthcare providers with questions/concerns
- Contact Westerners Officers or Dr. Kommer through the Westerner website