



THE SHAPE OF THE WORLD



# HOW TO GO OUTSIDE DURING A PANDEMIC

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*In April and May this will be frequently updated, so check back.*

## Outdoor Rules & FAQ's for Adults

### 1) WHERE IS IT SAFE TO GO EITHER BY MYSELF OR IN THE COMPANY OF SOMEONE I'M SHELTERING IN PLACE WITH?

It's absolutely safe to be in any outdoor area where other people are not. For example:

- An empty forest preserve or other large open space.
- A sidewalk with no sign of anyone walking toward you.
- A private backyard or porch.

### 2) IS A CITY PARK SAFE?

It is if two conditions are met:

- A.** Either no one else is around or if there are other park visitors, it's easy to stay far apart. Six feet is considered a safe distance for social interactions but since you can't control the actions of other people—and when you're outdoors, someone might unpredictably run toward you—greater distances are safer. Stay ten feet, twenty feet away from others.
- B.** There are no amenities around that you might end up touching, like park benches, metal railings or playground equipment.

### **3) BUT WAIT, WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO IF I MESS UP AND I ACCIDENTALLY TOUCH A PARK BENCH WHEN I'M OUTDOORS? SHOULD I BE WORRIED?**

A. Wash your hands or if you can't do that, use one of those hand sanitizers like Purell. Both work extremely well. (Especially the hand washing.) Don't touch your face. And no, you don't need to be worried because worrying is pointless. But do be proactive at taking these actions.

B. We don't know much about how long the coronavirus lives if it gets rubbed off of someone's fingers onto an object outdoors. The virus might not live very long; it's possible that when the virus is exposed to sunlight, it rapidly disintegrates. But we just don't know yet for sure. Epidemiologists have other research questions to worry about first. So implement and utilize the best practices for staying safe, the same actions you'd use if you were at the grocery store or anywhere else outside your home. Remain careful and disciplined

### **4) CAN I RUN OUTSIDE?**

Of course.

### **5) CAN I BIKE?**

Yes, definitely.

### **6) CAN I LIE DOWN AND TAKE A NAP?**

Sure, I guess so. Maybe pick a nice grassy spot that's out of the way, I don't want you to get stepped on.



*Cities under shelter-in-place orders are still allowing people to go outdoors. Some parks and public amenities are closed, depending on which city you are in.*

### **7) CAN I TAKE A WALK WITH A FRIEND?**

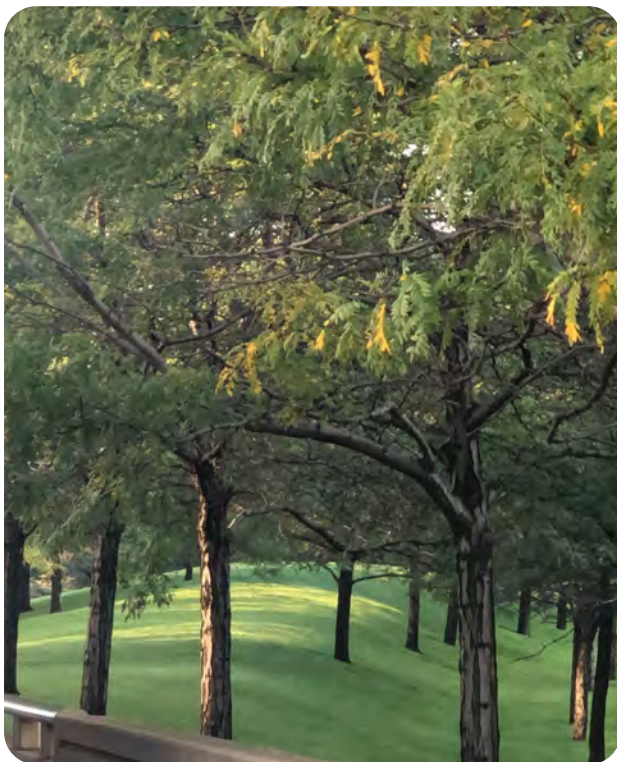
Yes. Have a conversation beforehand about how you're going to negotiate the distancing requirements and make sure you're both on the same page. Are you both willing to abide by the rule of remaining always a full six feet apart? It's going to feel weird because the width of a sidewalk in residential neighborhoods is often only five or six feet; you can't walk on an average sidewalk except with one person slightly ahead or behind one another. They aren't wide enough. It's best to select a place where you can walk together but stay six feet apart from one another with relative ease. If it's a huge struggle to figure out how to position yourselves, there's a greater chance of failure. Good options of where to go include large open spaces where you can make your

own paths, commercial areas where sidewalks are very wide, or industrial areas without sidewalks, and alleys.

Another option is to go out together with cell phones and earbuds. As you move along, stay a safe distance apart and talk by phone. This works particularly well for runners—that way you don't necessarily have to keep the same pace. (It does mean you have to listen to one another breathe, though.)

## **8) CAN I GO TO THE PARK ONCE A WEEK TO MEET MY PALS AND PLAY FRISBEE OR BASKETBALL?**

Gosh, no! Are you kidding? You'd be touching and retouching an object someone else has also been handling. Plus, you'd be congregating with a group. Please don't do that.



## **Outdoor Rules for Kids**

With kids, the rules are the same as those for adults with the added caveat that as the grown-up in charge, you really need to know the personalities and habits of the children you're with. At this point, given the restrictions on whom we can hang out with, the kids probably are your own offspring and you already know whether you have the type of daughter who's going to run over to the slides no matter what you say or have a son who, if he sees a friend, is going to give the friend a huge hug. Use what you know about your own children to set up rules before you leave the house, and then take children to locations where they won't encounter temptations.

It's safe, by the way, for you to bring a ball from your own home and take it someplace where there aren't any other kids around who might entice your child to throw to the ball to them. It's fine to kick, pitch, and bounce a ball outdoors—no different from doing it inside your own home. Just don't share the ball with others. It sounds mean, I know, but right now don't let your child exchange germs that come from the hands of someone with whom you're not sheltering in place.

And don't worry, the world won't always be like this.

## **How to Get Outside**

Walk out your door. There, you did it.



*Try new places, areas with wide walkways where it's easy to maintain a distance of six feet.*

## **How to Travel to an Outdoor Location That's a Little More Interesting or Beautiful**

It breaks my environmental heart to say it, but if you own a car, now is the time to use it. If no one but you and your family ever enter the car, its interior is safe as a room in your home. The germs are all your family's, no one else's. (By "family" I mean whatever form that comes in for you—genetically linked or cosmically linked or just consistently hanging out together in the same house during this crazy pandemic time.)

A bicycle is also good. So is a scooter.

Don't travel to a forest preserve or a beach using public

transportation. A ride in someone else's car—either a friend's or with a service like Uber or Lyft—is a better option because you're encountering the germs from only one individual rather than many, but still it's not secure. The driver could be infected with the virus or a passenger who rode in the car before you might have been ill.

And don't forget, going on nonessential outings is against many state's orders that require us to shelter in place except for essential reasons. I agree that it's essential for human beings to go outside and see the sky and feel the breeze and stretch our legs—but that doesn't mean the outdoors a few miles away is better than what's nearby.

Right now in Chicago and

some other cities, there are restrictions on which public parks are open. The most popular ones are closed because people are understandably tempted to congregate in beautiful places and that's what public officials are trying to deter—having unrelated people together in one place, standing near enough to one another that they might inhale droplets of coronavirus.

Go someplace you've never been before, explore a park that's less visited, less glamorous.

## **All these rules...this sounds hard. Is it worth it to go outside?**

That's up to you. Some people are avoiding going outside their own home for any reason and that's fine. It's a logical choice.

We know, though, that nature brings down cortisol levels, an indicator of stress. And we know that being outdoors is good for the immune system. Exercise is, too. Being healthy puts a person in a better position to fight off illness and recover more quickly. But that doesn't mean you have to go a long way from home to stay healthy.

There are lots of unpleasant side effects people experience when they're constantly indoors all the time—not scientific, but anecdotal. The phrase “stir crazy” was invented for a reason. If you find yourself feeling crabby or sad or anxious and can't really identify a cause, try stepping outside. Watch the motion of a tree branch swaying, a squirrel leaping

from a roof to a branch, or a brave daffodil being all yellow and cheerful-looking in spite of a raging pandemic. Observing that the whole rest of the world other than us is operating perfectly won't fix everything—but it might help make you feel ten percent better.



## **Things to Understand About the Virus So These Rules Make More Sense**

1. The coronavirus requires a human host to survive. If you're in an outdoor area where there are no humans, and no human passed through in the ten minutes before you arrived, there's no way you can breathe in the virus because it will not – cannot – be present in the air.
2. The coronavirus infects you by entering through your nose, mouth and sometimes eyes. It is those mucous membranes—the soft, moist, pink



*An alley allows sufficient space for six feet of social distance, and is a good place to take a walk with a friend. Cloth face coverings are recommended and in some places are required.*

tissues, not your tough epidermis—that are most susceptible to letting the virus make it inside your body.

3. It arrives in your nose, mouth or eyes through direct contact with an infected person who coughed, sneezed, laughed or in some other way expelled saliva or moist droplets from their nose or mouth. (This can happen indoors or outdoors.) The droplets containing the coronavirus can hang in the air for only ten minutes before gravity pulls them down toward the ground. Person-to-person is the primary way the virus is spreading and infecting people.

4. Droplets land on whatever lies below them, and then if you touch a surface or object that has the virus

resting on it and then you touch your own mouth, nose, or your eyes, the virus can enter that way. This is a less common path for the coronavirus to infect a person but it can happen.

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