



Health and Safety While Fishing and Boating During COVID-19 Era

A large percentage of the 220 Izaak Walton League chapters maintain a wide variety of outdoor recreational facilities including manmade ponds, natural lakes or access to streams or rivers. Many of their members and the public enjoy using these sites for fishing and boating.

As coronavirus restrictions on public gatherings are eased and “stay-at-home” orders are lifted, more members are returning to chapters and wanting to pursue their favorite outdoor pastime. It is also likely that chapters will begin hosting public aquatic events, such as fishing derbies or watercraft training sessions.

Times have changed as to how you maintain facilities and operate such events, as well as how we go fishing and boating during the COVID-19 era. You will need to use a common-sense approach, become more creative about hosting such events, and pay much more attention to health and safety details.

Success is achievable by adhering to current hygiene guidelines issued by local and state governments. However, you will have to move beyond merely requiring face coverings, limiting group sizes, and promoting social distancing.

Safety Considerations

Consider the health and well-being of yourself and others while fishing or boating.

According to the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), if you are interested in enjoying the outdoors and going fishing or boating, check the status of current state and local (county/city/town) regulations. Then review the latest COVID-19 updates on your state fish and wildlife agency website (<https://www.takemefishing.org/how-to-fish/fishing->

[resources-events/state-agency-covid-19-updates/](#)).

Social Distancing

You can reduce the potential of person-to-person spread of coronavirus by:

- Minimizing crowd size at any one time, whether on the shores of a fishing pond or at a boat launch area. Also, limit the numbers of boaters on board and promote single-person kayaks and canoes whenever possible.
- Limiting close person-to-person contact between volunteers and the public. For example, rather than handling another person's fishing pole, just hold the line and bait the hook.
- Keeping social distancing practices in minds when limiting the number of anglers. Remember a six-foot social distance between yourself and others as a rule of thumb. For example, if hosting a youth fishing event, stake out pre-determined, well-spaced locations along the water's edge for anglers to cast from.
- Establishing a reservation system in order to stagger access to the fishing events and boat ramps and start times.

Keep It Clean

You can further protect anglers and boaters by:

- Ensuring that volunteers use personal protective equipment, including masks or face coverings.
- Keeping people safe by having a supply of hand sanitizer, disposable gloves, and face masks available.
- Using disinfectant wipes to clean shared fishing rods, tackle boxes, and other equipment as well as hard surfaces that are touched frequently.

- Maintaining a supply of spray cleaning solution that is easy to find and available for frequent use. For example, every time a user leaves a canoe or kayak, sanitizing it is in order.
- Staging adequate trash cans for disposing used gloves and disinfectant wipes and emptying the waste contents often.

Other Hygiene Tips

- Limit access to restrooms and keep them clean and disinfected.
- Consider prohibiting smoking, to help reduce airborne germs, and the use of smokeless tobacco, thus eliminating spitting.
- Close off water fountains and encourage users to bring their own water.
- If an event sign-in sheet is required, have several pens that are kept wiped with a disinfectant solution after use.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water or use hand sanitizer before and after fishing and after touching any surfaces shared with others.
- Should any volunteer or guest feel sick or have any symptoms of COVID-19, insist that they stay home.

Communications

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of clear communications to your members and their guests about abiding by health and safety measures.

- Keep your members and the public informed by promoting these health and safety practices using the chapter's newsletter, social media, and website.
- Communicate your hygiene and safety rules with reminder posters and warning signs located not just at the fishing and boating sites but throughout the chapter grounds and in the chapterhouse.

- Maintain and staff a welcome table to greet all who attend, while being mindful of social distancing during public events,. Inform visitors of personal safety techniques (including how to minimize crowd sizes), offer face masks and gloves, and point out locations of first aid and hand sanitizer stations.
- Encourage everyone to stay safe by continuing to take these precautionary measures during this time.

Liability

Whether you have fishing ponds or lakes, boat launch areas, campsites, shooting ranges or hiking trails, chapters that offer members and the public access to outdoor recreation facilities should require a signed liability release form. Consider...

- Amending your existing member liability form to include a reference, warning and acknowledgment of potential exposure to COVID-19 while engaging in activities at the chapter.
- Contacting your chapter's insurance agent to review your liability insurance policy.
- Being aware of members' vulnerability due to older age, pre-existing conditions and current health issues. If a vulnerable member is volunteering as a fishing or boating event leader or in another role, and is feeling ill, have them stay home.
- Actively enforcing your health and safety rules for anglers and boaters.

Another Resource

RBFF has also been compiling strategies on how to fish and boat safely (<https://news.takemefishing.org/position-statement>).

Fishing and boating allow a person to release stress, relax, enjoy the outdoors and spend more time in nature. RBFF recently launched a new marketing campaign called "Get On Board" to raise awareness about the

wellness benefits of fishing and boating. You can learn more at <https://www.takemefishing.org/how-to-fish/fishing-resources/get-on-board/>.

As you work to responsibly re-open your chapter and welcome back anglers and boating enthusiasts and teach first-timers to fish, review and use these health and safety strategies to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and you will bring success to your chapter.

For more information, contact Earl Hower, IWLA Director of Chapter Relations, by emailing chapters@iwla.org.