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Public Works, Parks and Recreation

As many municipalities are opening and/or moving into early phases of re-opening, local leaders are starting to think about when and how to reopen recreational spaces. In some cities, larger parks have remained open for public use with physical distancing guidelines in place, while smaller spaces, such as playgrounds and vital recreation centers, have been closed.

Parks and recreational spaces are in high demand as residents have been confined to their homes and need places to exercise and get fresh air. In addition, as school districts wrap up an atypical school year, many parents and children eagerly wait for summer learning programs or camps to open after months of afterschool program closures. In response, a growing number of cities have moved beyond traditional recreation spaces such as playgrounds, large green spaces and parks. Instead, they are offering temporary road closures that allow for bike and pedestrian traffic and are opening empty parking lots where children can safely play. Some communities are also considering opening up recreation centers to accommodate children and youth who will otherwise be unsupervised and potentially not able to follow physical distancing guidelines.

As cities begin to reopen closed spaces and consider a changing mix of recreational spaces as a result of the pandemic, NLC has consulted with partners including the National Recreation and Parks Association, Children & Nature Network, 10 Minute Walk, American Camp Association, as well as the Centers for Disease Control, to produce a list of reopening considerations.

Assess safety of reopening natural and recreational spaces and plan accordingly.

- Consider setting up a cross-sector recovery team** including public health officials, law enforcement, community advocates, and social workers to ensure reopening procedures are inclusive and equitable. A suggested list of team members can be found [here](#).
- Inventory all city recreational and natural spaces and conduct a risk assessment.** The National Recreation and Park Association has a helpful rating system that can be found [here](#).
- Consider a phased re-opening approach** based on the risk assessment and equity, to provide access to communities most in need of outdoor amenities safely and while minimizing risk of spreading the virus.

- **Consult assessments of parks and green space access in your city and consider street closures.** If there are neighborhoods without low-risk outdoor options, consider temporary street or parking lot closures to provide safe spaces for exercise and fresh air. [ParkServe](#) is a free mapping tool to look at current park access and need in 14,000 cities and towns.
- **Consider what spaces will need extra cleaning** upon reopening and plan accordingly to minimize risk for both visitors and staff members; assure there is safe access to bathrooms and water. Some cities, like Rochester, MN, are instituting 'pack in, pack out' policies to minimize handling of visitor waste.

Codify and communicate health and safety protocols to keep residents and staff safe.

- **Promote physical distancing** by installing visual markers, barriers, and signage to ensure visitors remain six or more feet apart.
- **Block off and frequently sanitize high contact surfaces** such as benches, playgrounds, and picnic tables to minimize the spread of germs.
- **Consider requiring visitors to use masks** if recreational space is too small to keep proper distancing or is consistently crowded.
- **Ensure all staff members are properly equipped with PPE** and, where possible, create physical barriers to protect staff and help maintain distance from visitors.
- **Carefully approach enforcement of access** and use guidelines to avoid reinforcing longstanding inequities in public spaces.

Resources

- National Recreation and Park Association [Path to Recovery](#) Guide
- Center for Disease Control [Visiting Parks and Recreational Facilities](#) guidelines
- Center for Disease Control [Guidance for Administrators in Parks and Recreational Facilities](#) guidelines
- [Children and Nature Network American Camp Association Camp Operations Guide](#)
- 10 Minute Walk's [new public survey](#) on park use and attitudes during COVID