



Rivers to Ridges' Emerging Practices for Year-Round Outdoor Programming: Responding to COVID-19 in Yukon

With the ever-evolving reality of COVID-19 in Yukon, we recognize that this is a living document, to be adjusted and adapted as the situation changes.

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Introduction

This document is Rivers to Ridges' response plan for COVID-19 to mitigate risk and keep both staff and participants safe during the continuing uncertainty of the pandemic. This document addresses the Yukon Government recommendations and six steps to staying safe:

- Physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet)
- Regular hand washing
- Staying home when sick
- Gathering outdoors in groups of no more than 50
- Limiting travel to rural communities
- Self-isolating when required by CMOH orders and recommendations

First, read through the context for Rivers to Ridges to understand more about Indigenous perspectives, the benefits of outdoor programming and responsible risk management.

Context

Understanding Indigenous Perspectives

Accessing lands, waters and wilderness of Yukon must be done with consideration to the Indigenous people of this land, and their perspectives. As settlers on this land, Rivers to Ridges acknowledges the Indigenous people who have been leaders in land-based learning in the Yukon for many years. Personally and professionally, we continue to listen to, learn from, and support the work of Indigenous Knowledge Holders, Elders, governments, youth and organizations on this land.

As the situation in Yukon continues to be manageable, and as people continue to access and connect with nature, it is important to Rivers to Ridges as an organization that we continue to hold Indigenous perspectives in the forefront of our planning. Rivers to Ridges remains committed to working with local Indigenous Knowledge Holders, Elders, governments, and organizations to create a plan that is inclusive, respectful and responsible. We will strive to invite Elders into our programming on a case-by-case basis, while monitoring the changing restrictions, health recommendations, and wishes of First Nations and communities.

Benefits of Outdoor Programming

There are innumerable health benefits to being on the land, benefits that are physical, mental, and emotional. The more we connect with the natural rhythms of the land, the more we tune in with our own rhythms. Through providing programming structured around time spent on the land, building trust, modelling positive behaviours, and inspiring deep connection to the land, Rivers to

Ridges aims to help young learners be empowered to feel confident, aware, empathetic and connected to their community. The need for this is apparent now more than ever.

Responsible Risk Management

Operating in an outdoor setting can introduce variables that contribute to a heightened degree of risk, both real and perceived. Rivers to Ridges has a well developed system of risk management to ensure that an acceptable level of risk is both maintained and encouraged. These systems of risk management are based on the understanding that acceptable risk is worth it, and the benefits of outdoor programming necessitate a carefully and thoughtfully considered balance of risk and reward to be able to continue to provide these services to the public. This approach to risk management is the same approach we will take with COVID-19.

Physical Distancing

At Rivers to Ridges programming, we are outside for the majority (or all) of our time. We have small group sizes, and consistent staff on the ground. All of these factors contribute to a healthy learning environment in the midst of the uncertainty of COVID-19.

Our prevention measures and mitigation strategies at Rivers to Ridges place an emphasis on *reducing physical contact versus physical distancing*. In other words, strict physical distancing will not be enforced at outdoor Rivers to Ridges programs. Depending on participant age and stage of development, enforcing physical distancing can impact social and emotional learning. Close interaction, through playing and socializing, is central to development and will not be discouraged during Rivers to Ridges programs.

With this in mind, additional responsibilities are required of families and educators to prevent further spread of COVID-19 within the community.

- Physical distancing within program will be encouraged through activities where possible.
- Participants will be informed of the regulations/best practices of physical distancing, and encouraged to practice this as much as possible.
- In programs for children over the age of 7 years old, staff will encourage and remind participants of physical distancing throughout the program.
- Families are encouraged to avoid entering program spaces.

Note: Emerging research suggests that children are less susceptible to contracting, transmitting, and showing symptoms from this virus. Furthermore, with this demographic, constant physical distancing is neither practical nor possible during many outdoor events. Physical distancing will be encouraged *where possible*, and staff and other adults will be key in the practice and management of this (e.g. physical distancing at pick up/drop off, etc.).

Drop Off and Pick Up Procedures

- Families will be required to answer screening questions with staff upon arrival at program each day.
- Program location and/or timing may be adapted to relieve overcrowding of high-traffic areas such as pick up/drop off spot:
 - Families will have a window of time in which to drop off or pick up their child from program -- this will allow for greater ease of physical distancing between families.
- Sign in/out: Program staff will meet participants and family at the program entrance/drop-off & pick-up location. To reduce high-contact objects, family members will show picture ID, and the program staff will sign in/out the participant.
- Only participants and program staff will enter the program area. Families and guardians will be asked to wait outside of the program area during pick-up and drop-off when possible.
- Physical distancing signs will be visible to families at the pick up/drop off area, as well as reminders to stay home if they are experiencing any symptoms.
 - Symptoms include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion, headache, and a general feeling of being unwell.
- Families will maintain physical distance with other families and participants.
- Participants will wash hands (with soap and water, or alcohol-based sanitizer) upon arrival at program each day, and upon departure.

Safety and Wellness

Prior to Program

- Relevant land managers and Indigenous communities will be contacted to seek their guidance about running programming on their land.
- Families/guardians will receive COVID-19 information and provide Rivers to Ridges with their informed consent by signing the COVID-19 waiver. This waiver will:
 - State the possibility of contracting COVID-19 from program, despite safeguards and mindful practices in place
 - Outline the requirement for families to “prescreen” their child, checking their child’s temperature before program each day, and checking for symptoms.
 - Encourage families with vulnerable individuals at home to consider the increased risk to their family in sending their youth to program.
 - Remind families that they will be asked daily if they have travelled outside Yukon, BC, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut in the past 14 days, if they have had and recovered from COVID, or been in contact with someone with COVID in the past 14 days.

- Download signage from Yukon.ca and place them throughout the program area to communicate all the measures in place to reduce the potential spread of the virus
- Prepare for possible closure in case of a positive COVID-19 test within Rivers to Ridges team or participants.

Preparing Staff

Staff will receive COVID-19 training. This training will include:

- Expectations and procedures for asking families/guardians to check symptoms and temperatures of participants before each day. Visible signage will act as a reminder to family/guardians of this.
- Adjusted program planning, as affected by physical distancing
- Plan for the emergency use of PPE at program
- Trauma-informed training to inform interactions with participants and families, providing staff with the skills to support participants and families with understanding and empathy, building a sense of safety and connection.
- Procedures if staff or participant become ill while at program
- Staff members, along with families or guardians and participants, will be informed they must not attend the program if they are sick, *even if symptoms resemble a mild cold.*
 - Symptoms include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion, headache, and a general feeling of being unwell.
- Required record-keeping: daily health checklist for self and for participants (staff will also be required to do their own daily temperature checks before program)
- Cleaning and disinfecting protocols
- Review of good personal hygiene practices and how to teach these to participants
- Revised drop-off and pick-up procedures, if relevant
- Approval process to allow vetting of staff - staff considered to be high-risk or who live with those considered to be high-risk individuals will not be working with participants.
- When running programs in rural communities, staff will be cautious and respond to the individual needs and wishes of that community and First Nation

Screening

- Staff members, participants and families must not attend program if they are sick, *even if symptoms resemble a mild cold.*
 - Symptoms include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion, headache, and a general feeling of being unwell.
- Families are required to pre-screen their child, checking their temperature before program in addition to answering screening questions with an educator upon arrival at program each day. Surveys will include asking if there are any of the following symptoms:
 - Cough;

- Fever;
- Shortness of breath; or
- A general feeling of being unwell (including sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion, headache)

Staff and participants with any of these symptoms cannot attend the program.

- Records will be kept of attendance, screening, and of any visitors or special guests attending the program each day, in order to facilitate contact tracing in the event of an outbreak.

Handwashing, Cleaning and Prevention

Hand Washing

- Staff will practice and role-model exemplary hand washing and sanitizing.
- Staff will remind and encourage participants to wash their hands regularly, and carry hand sanitizer when washrooms or wash stations are not available.
- Hand washing posters will be posted visibly around indoor space.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at entrance for families, staff, and scheduled guests.
- Hand washing/sanitizing should take place (although not exclusively) :
 - Upon arrival at program
 - Before eating food
 - After being in contact with someone who may have been sick
 - After touching frequently touched surfaces (doorknobs, washroom surfaces, etc.)
 - After using the washroom
 - After using common items (tools, loose parts, craft supplies, etc.)
 - After coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose

Cleaning and Sanitizing

- Staff will engage in frequent, thorough cleaning and disinfecting each day.
- Frequently touched surfaces (doorknobs, taps, washroom surfaces, easy-to-clean loose parts, etc.) will be cleaned with disinfectant at the beginning/end of each day.
- Disinfectant spray will be easily accessible to educators (and volunteers) to distribute to participants as needed throughout the day.
- Shared supplies, tools, and materials will be limited as much as possible, and when shared will be sanitized before and after use by participants.
- There will be scheduled cleaning of surfaces, objects, and equipment.
- Hygiene supplies will be provided to staff and participants, including: soap, water, hand sanitizer, paper towels, etc.

Prevention

- Participants and staff will follow public health and infection prevention and control measures with regular and thorough hand washing and sanitizing practices as outlined above.
- Participants will be reminded at the beginning of each day when and how to wash their hands, how to cover sneezes and coughs, and the importance of not touching their face or touching others.
- Guidance from Yukon Government: Practicing good hygiene is an essential and effective part of preventing the spread of COVID-19. Take these measures to protect yourself and others from getting sick:
 - Wash your hands often (in addition to routine times such as after using the washroom, before eating and when handling food for the public);
 - Cough/Sneeze into your elbow or tissue and throw away;
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands; and
 - Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not readily available.

Meals & Food Handling

- Participants will bring their own food from home.
 - If a participant does not have a home-provided meal for the day, the program may provide food to the participant. Staff will serve individually wrapped food directly to the participants.
 - A “no food sharing” policy will be practiced in all Rivers to Ridges programs
- All participants will bring their own labelled water bottles.
 - If a participant forgets a water bottle, the program will provide them with a clean and sanitized drinking vessel for the day.
- All personal items (food, water bottles, backpacks, etc.) must be **labelled with** participant’s name.
- Following recommendations from Yukon Government, activities involving child participation in indoor food preparation will not take place at this time.
- Physical distancing will be especially encouraged while eating.

Illness at Program

In addition to our standard practice of staying home when sick to ensure the health and well-being of all participants and staff, Rivers to Ridges is following the guidelines of Yukon Government, and requiring all children and staff to stay home if they have:

- any symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious respiratory disease;
- travelled outside of British Columbia, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut in the last 14 days; or

- had close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have been directed to self-isolate by Yukon Communicable Disease Control.

Participants

- If a child develops symptoms of being sick while at the program, they will be isolated away from other children (when possible) and the parent/guardian will be notified to come and pick them up immediately.
 - If a separate space is not available, the child will be kept at least 2 metres away from other children.
- If a child requires close contact and care, staff and child alike will wear masks, and staff will continue to care for the child until the family or guardian is able to pick them up. (Any sort of mask may be used, scarf, medical mask if available, etc.)
 - Staff should wash their hands before donning a mask and before and after removing the mask (as per mask guidance), and before and after touching any items used by the child.
- Any items used by the child while isolated will be cleaned and disinfected as soon as the child has been picked up.
 - Items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected (e.g. paper, books, pelts, etc.) will be removed from the program and stored in a sealed container for 10 days minimum
- Children can return to program when they are symptom free, or if a healthcare provider has cleared them to return.
- At this time, Rivers to Ridges can not offer refunds for absence due to illness, including COVID-19.

Staff

- If a staff person becomes ill while at work, they will immediately remove themselves from contact with others. They will contact a Director and go home.

Guidance from Yukon Government:

- Symptomatic employees will be required to self-isolate until tested for COVID-19 and then follow the guidance of the public health professional (e.g. nurse).
- If the test results are negative for COVID-19 but the employee remains ill and/or symptomatic, they should remain on sick leave and follow the guidance of the public health professional. COVID-19 symptoms include:
 - cough, fever and/or chills; or difficulty breathing.

Closure

Should a second wave of COVID-19 reach Whitehorse, Rivers to Ridges will follow and adhere to the updated health guidelines of Yukon Government.

- Programs may be cancelled with short notice if staff shortages occur due to illness.
- Program cancellation may happen prior to or during a day of programming. In the event of cancellation during the day, families will be notified and asked to pick their children up immediately.

Visitors

Visiting Elders, Knowledge Holders and other local experts are an important part of our programming at Rivers to Ridges. The knowledge and experiences shared helps to enrich the connection of participants to the land where they play and learn.

The wellbeing of Elders, Knowledge Holders, community members, and participants is greatly important and must be considered and balanced in these uncertain times. During the uncertainty of COVID-19, any guests to Rivers to Ridges will follow the same steps of daily pre-screening and screening questionnaire followed by participants and staff. Records will be kept of any visitors to the program for two weeks to aid in any contact tracing, should it be required.

Additional Precautions

- **Masks**
 - Following current recommendations, participants will not be required to wear masks during program, but they are welcome to if that feels right for your child.
 - Similarly, families are not required to wear masks when picking up or dropping off their child, but are welcome to do so if that feels most comfortable.
 - Educators will wear masks when administering First Aid
- **Volunteers, Guests & Visitors**
 - Any persons visiting the program who are not participants or educators must read and sign Rivers to Ridges' Waiver of Liability regarding COVID-19, and must complete the appropriate daily COVID-19 screening questionnaire before entering the site.

Closing Thoughts and Summary

Rivers to Ridges understands that environmental and cultural stewardship is all of our responsibilities, and the return of outdoor organizations to open spaces will allow us to once again resume our role in modelling and coaching ethical behaviour and connection.

Rivers to Ridges outdoor day programs have adapted their programming, protocol, and policies and practices to meet the Yukon Government recommendations on COVID-19.

This chart provides the highlights:

Government of Yukon Guidelines	Rivers to Ridges Responses
Physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff training on physical distancing and how to encourage this in participants without causing social or emotional stress - Activities modified to support physical distancing - Official signage posted for families - Modified drop-off and pick-up procedures
Regular hand washing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New policies and routines on hand washing and sanitizing - Sanitizing hand stations accessible during program
Staying home when sick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daily routine screening procedures - Illness procedures for staff and participants who fall sick at program - Family/guardian signing of informed consent waiver form
Not gathering in groups of more than 50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Following recommended gathering numbers and adjusting programs as gathering size allowances change
Limiting travel to rural communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff will limit travel to rural communities - When running programs in rural communities, staff will be cautious and respond to the individual needs and wishes of that community and First Nation
Self-isolating when required by CMOH orders and recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies and procedures are in place for self-isolation should a participant or staff test positive for COVID-19

Guiding Documents

- BC Centre for Disease Control and BC Ministry of Health: [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings](#)

- Canadian Outdoor Summit - COVID-19 Principles and Emerging Practices for the Canadian Outdoor Sector
- City of Whitehorse Recreation & Facility Services - Summer Day Camps 2020 COVID-19 Plan
- Yukon [Summer Day Camp Guidelines](#)
- Yukon Health and Wellness - [Guide for child care centres and family homes](#)