

## **FAQs - Parks Closures and Outdoor Activities Protocol during Shelter in Place Order**

3.24.20

### **What is the parks closure order?**

- On March 23, Sonoma County Interim Public Health Officer Dr. Sundari Mase issued a health order closing all parks within Sonoma County beginning March 24 and remaining in effect until further notice. The closure applies to all agencies and jurisdictions operating parks and open spaces in Sonoma County. It comes after parks, trails and beaches countywide were crowded with visitors during the first weekend of the shelter-in-place orders issued by the county and state.

### **Can I walk to the parks?**

- At this time, the parks are closed to all visitors – whether you drive or walk or cycle to the parks. For the shelter-in-place order to work, we need to practice social distancing. Staying close to home is the best way to protect ourselves and our community.
- If you live near a park, we ask you to follow the closure order and not walk in. We're also asking people not to drive to surrounding neighborhoods and walk in. These next few weeks are critical if we are going to flatten the curve and slow the spread of the virus.

### **Why can't I walk into the parks?**

- The closure order is intended to keep us home so we can slow the spread of the virus. Due to park design, many parks can still get crowded if walk-in access is allowed. Walk-in access also presents an issue of equity for people who don't live near parks. We know this is a disappointing development, but we're really asking for your cooperation.
- We had hoped the parks could remain a resource for basic activities, but the greater health of our community makes closing them the right choice at this time.

### **What if I walk into the park anyway? Will I get a ticket?**

We hope you'll comply with the closure order. If rangers find you in a park, they'll let you know the parks are closed and ask you to leave. The intent is first to educate and ask for your cooperation. If you refuse to comply, you could be cited.

### **Why are the bike trails still open – but only for pedestrians?**

- Under the parks closure order, class 1 trails like the Joe Rodota Trail and the West County Trail are open to pedestrians. In some locations, these trails serve as essential neighborhood pathways, functioning like sidewalks. They remain open to let residents move about within their neighborhoods. They're closed to cyclists to help prevent crowding and to reinforce the intent of the stay-at-home order.

### **How am I supposed to stay active if I can't use my parks?**

- The health order does allow for limited outdoor exercise if we stay 6 feet from people who are not members of our household. Health authorities encourage us to do things

like walk or ride bike around our neighborhoods. Play games or exercise in our yards. Garden or do outside chores or walk the dog. We know it's disappointing to not be able to use the parks but staying close to home right now is the best way to slow the spread of this virus.

**Can I exercise on school yards and playing fields?**

School yards are considered public parks when school is not in session, so this closure order applies to those spaces as well.

**Why did you make the parks free last week, only to close them days later?**

- Like everyone, we are doing our best to adapt while this emergency evolves. When the initial stay-at-home order was issued, we hoped the parks could be a resource for the community. However, we also suspended all but essential services at that time. We waived fees to eliminate the need for staff to process sales and to help make the parks more accessible.
- Like park managers throughout the country, we didn't anticipate the record number of visitors we'd receive. Unfortunately, too many people using the parks violates the intent of the stay-at-home order and makes social distancing challenging if not impossible. It also strains our ability to keep conditions safe and clean.

**I paid for an annual membership. Will you extend the expiration date of my membership?**

We understand your concern about your membership. We will address this in the future. Right now, we're focusing our limited resources on getting information out about the parks closure and ensuring the safety of staff who are enforcing the closure.