

Dear Appalachian Trail Hiker,

In a few days, weeks or months, you are planning to embark on a journey on the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) — a journey many have described as “once in a lifetime” and “life-changing.” Some of you may have already begun your journeys. You’ve likely scrimped and saved to make this journey possible. You’ve combed over data, maps, and countless pages of information to prepare yourself. However, there is a [highly contagious virus](#) spreading throughout the country, including in Appalachian Trail states, and we have all been asked to make changes, make sacrifices, and/or take precautions to minimize its spread.

**We at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) are now asking you to do the same: please postpone your section or thru-hike. Instead, consider alternate ways of connecting to the Trail and to the outdoors.**

We do not make this request lightly. We manage and protect the A.T. because it is meant to be hiked. However, the practices necessary to support a section or thru-hike may make A.T. hikers vectors to spread COVID-19 — whether congregating at shelters or around picnic tables, traveling to trailheads in shuttle vans, or lodging at the various hostels up and down the Trail.

Should you decide to embark on your Trail journey despite the risk of exposing yourself or others to COVID-19, we ask you to consider the following:

- **Your starting point:** Do not start your section or thru-hike at the southern end of the Trail. Amicalola Falls State Park and Springer Mountain are the most common starting points, making them difficult places to establish distance between people. Large numbers start at these locations every day in March and April, and shelters and campsites at the southern end of the Trail stay crowded for weeks.
- **Your finances:** All hikers who show symptoms of COVID-19 should self-quarantine off Trail and stay off Trail until approved for return by a qualified medical professional. Hikers with symptoms of COVID-19 should minimize the potential spread of the virus by refraining from using public transportation — including shuttles, buses, rental cars, or planes — to travel home. Hikers should also have resources for medical and lodging expenses incurred during quarantine. Lastly, consider expenses associated with traveling home should a loved one contract the virus and require your care.
- **Reduced support options:** Many businesses and service providers along the Trail are closing temporarily. Local search and rescue may be dealing with local cases. Shuttle providers and Trail angels may be staying home, unwilling to put themselves or their families at risk. Fewer people will likely be willing to pick up hitchhikers. Hostels, outfitters, and libraries may be closed. Places that hold hiker packages may also close. Grocery stores and other locations where you were planning to resupply may have reduced inventory or may be sold out of vital items. And, to keep ATC staff safe and to avoid spreading the virus, ridge runners and caretakers normally found on Trail will no longer be available. Until further notice, all ATC Visitor Centers will be closed.
- **Consider shelter:** Plan to avoid shelters and other points of congregation for overnight accommodation. Self-supported camping on durable surfaces 200 feet from water sources with

ample distance between tents is recommended. Hikers should also avoid using privies; instead, [dig a cat hole](#) more than 200 feet from water sources and camping areas.

- **Vulnerable A.T. communities/limited healthcare options:** Many communities along the Trail are likely low on resources and may have over-burdened healthcare systems. Carrying COVID-19 from the Trail into these communities (or vice versa) puts their healthcare systems, their healthcare workers, and the very communities that serve the Trail at risk. Some communities do not have healthcare options at all.
- **Spreading the virus:** The Appalachian Trail is not an easy place to isolate yourself. Staying in hostels, shopping at local grocery stores, eating in local restaurants, drinking beer in local bars — or the temptation to huddle with others in a shelter on a cold, rainy night when your gear is wet — are all chances to contract or spread COVID-19.

We know this is not an easy or small decision to make, but the impacts of potentially spreading COVID-19 during your journey are big.

Again, we urge anyone planning to section or thru-hike the Trail this year to postpone their hikes. If you do decide to hit the Trail, exercise caution and minimize risk to yourself, other Trail users, and to the Trail's communities. If you have already begun your journey, we urge you to return home until these risks have passed.

Thank you,

Sandra "Sandi" Marra  
President & CEO  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy