

By now, all Scouts WA members will be aware that the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic is a significant public health issue facing the world. The situation is evolving rapidly and changes to public policy are occurring on a daily basis.

Scouts WA has convened a COVID-19 Action Group to provide direction for the Branch and make sure Scouters throughout the state are directed to the most up to date sources of information.

This community health issue will be an ongoing challenge in the coming weeks and months. As Scouts, we 'Act Respectfully', 'Do What is Right' and 'Believe in Ourselves'. Keeping yourself informed, taking responsible personal decisions and caring for those at risk in our community will be at the forefront of our approach.

Most of this message will look like a list of what you CANNOT or SHOULD NOT do. But as resilient Scouts, we firstly encourage you to always keep in mind what you CAN do!

We can look after ourselves. We can be caring and considerate of others.
We can keep Scouting - even if we can't meet in person for a period of time in the future. (This is almost certainly going to happen at some stage in the next few weeks or months).

NOW is the time to come up with your best ideas about how you can make sure you keep in touch with your Scouting program in the event of a suspension of meetings or if you need to self-isolate.

What challenges, awards or badges can you work towards whilst you are at home? Come up with something your Patrol or Unit can all do separately at the same time and then share what you've done all together online using the best means you can (Lone Scouts have been doing this for decades!)

Challenge your youth members to come up with some great ideas about what to do and how to do it - they are capable of amazing and inspiring ideas!

As of Monday 16 March at 09:00 WST, the following advice is correct

Scouting in WA can still operate. If the advice from the Health Department or Education department changes, we will do our best to let you know. If closures to schools are announced or restrictions on small non-essential gatherings are imposed, Scouting activities and physical meetings of any sort will go into recess.

Effective immediately, all international travel on behalf of Scouts Australia is now suspended until 30 June 2020. International travel includes all National Contingents, Branch Friendship Tours, Conferences, Workshops and other meetings. (Virtual participation should be considered for any meetings that are proceeding during this suspension.)

Who should not attend Scouting activities or meetings as of now?

The following groups of people (whether they are members, supporters or family members) should not attend any form of Scouting:

- anyone who has been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- anyone who has been overseas in the last 14 days
- anyone who has a fever or shows any form of sickness or has symptoms of respiratory, gastrointestinal or flu-like illness.

Members who are vulnerable or at risk (which includes people aged over 65 or those with multiple medical conditions) should not attend Scouting events or meetings if at all possible. (We realise this may impact a number of key supporters. Please be considerate and creative about how you can continue help these members to make a useful contribution in their Scouting roles).

General advice

Emphasise personal hygiene and “social distancing” to reduce the risk of transmission

- Regular washing of hands with soap and water and not sharing hand towels.
- Covering nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Shaking hands should be avoided. (We recommend a salute be substituted - and touch the salute to your hat - not your face)
- Use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers. Note that these may be in limited availability and are still not as effective as good hand washing with soap and water. Don't use home-made versions of sanitiser.)

For non-program meetings, consider cancelling meetings or moving them online. If you must meet, do as much as you can to stick to the most up to date advice.

Major Events

All non-essential gatherings of more than 500 people are currently prohibited. Due to this advice, we regret that Joey Leap will be cancelled. Further information will be released in due course, including addressing any fees paid and the possibility of rescheduling.

Looking forwards, Scouts WA will be regularly reviewing the upcoming calendar of events and making decisions and recommendations based on up to date policies and information. This includes consideration of events like Campwest. Scouts Australia will be deciding on actions to take about National events. We recommend against any international travel for Scouting at this time.

Group and Section Meetings

Currently, most group activities and section meetings are still going ahead. Please make sure you observe appropriate increased personal hygiene and social distancing measures.

Members or their parents, or Leaders and supporters who do not feel comfortable attending activities or meetings should be supported in this choice. Please give consideration to the financial impact that any current restrictions may be having on families.

Group Camps and Activities

Most camps are currently proceeding, but you should discuss these decisions at your group and decide what is right for you and your members for now. As a minimum you should:

- Make sure people who are unwell or expected to self-isolate do not attend.
- Any attendee who becomes unwell whilst on the activity should go home immediately and seek medical advice.
- Ensure there are adequate facilities for high standards of personal hygiene and there is adequate space for sleeping arrangements that are not crowded.
- Review your plans for events to ensure the effects of last-minute cancellations are considered and minimised, such as:
 - Don't buy food or pay for hired gear too early, as you won't be able to return and refund participants
 - Reconsider activities involving upfront payments weeks ahead, losing funds if your activity is cancelled
 - Consider modifying your activities to reduce the risk of wastage with perishables if your activity needs to be cancelled with little notice.
 - You may want to consider moving large activities to Term 3 or 4 at this stage (though we cannot say with any certainty when restrictions will be introduced or reduced).

Where can you find reliable information to base decisions on?

The WA Health Department Website <https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus>

The Australian Government Health Department Website
<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources>

The WA Education Department Website <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/coronavirus-school-update>

Who is in the Scouts WA COVID-19 Action Group?

The group is chaired by Dr Scott Sargant (MBBS BPharm FANZCA), Branch Vice President who is a specialist anaesthetist working at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Dr David Adam (MBBS DCH FRACGP) a General Practitioner and Dr Katherine Norton (MBChB DCH DTMH FRACP) an Infectious Diseases specialist.- all WA Scouters. It also includes the Acting Chief Commissioner, the Board Chairman and the Executive Manager. This Group will be deciding actions to be taken at a Branch level in response to changes in Government advice and providing general advice for Scouters throughout the state.