

Considerations¹ Early in the Reopening of Facilities in the USA

A joint ZAHF Fusion Center and AAZV document

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As the nation begins to awaken from weeks of quarantine, a list of considerations and trends in new procedures has been collected for your viewing pleasure. This represents information gathered from news articles, various list serves and, in some cases, detailed opening plans that are very institutionally specific. These are not to be considered 'best practices' as what is appropriate for one facility may not be at all a best practice for another. The considerations that were cited most frequently are noted in red. AAZV and the ZAHF Fusion Center are aware of a study that will include zoo and aquariums in a more scientific review at a later date.

Several common themes emerged during the review of these materials:

1. **Phase design**- many facilities have stated that they are following the guidelines with the re-opening Phases that have been developed state-by-state, and have tailored their protocols accordingly. Some states classify facilities as 'entertainment' while other states classify facilities as 'parks' and there appears to be differences in how this classification relates to re-opening.
2. **Cleaning and Disinfection**-there is a heavy emphasis on citing changes in cleaning and disinfection protocols. It was cited several times that staff is being brought back for this specific purpose, and new protocols have been added to keep work areas and public contact areas as clean as possible.
3. **Masks**- Masks, and requirements for them varies tremendously. Some examples are cited below.
4. **Signage**- There will be a heavy emphasis on signage to direct traffic flow, hygiene principles, or other new protocols to protect the public.
5. **Social Distancing**- is heavily relied upon for staff and visitors.

Guest and staff general safety

- Hand sanitizer pumps provided at various points around the facility
- Touchless thermometers to scan guests, employees and volunteers
- 'Ambassadors' stationed at key locations for guidance
- Announced they partnered with local hospital to develop protocols
- Created an Infection Control Task Force
- Staff provided with personal sized hand sanitizer bottles
- Employees and guests encouraged to stay home if unwell

Employee specific considerations

- Staggered work shifts developed
- Unwell employees stay home
- Health and hygiene reminders in employee areas
- All employees shall wear appropriate PPE based on job description and state/local regulations and guidance
- Employees are asked to sign a self-certification form indicating that they have a temp less than 100F, and are not coughing or short of breath

¹ This information was not gathered in a consistent scientific manner. It was collected from news clips, email conversations and full re-opening plans, when provided.

- Discontinue use of 'shared food' items
- Employees in guest transactions and cleaning services wear masks and gloves
- Non-invasive temp checks upon arrival (staff)
- Ill or feverish employees sent home
- Masks made available to all employees
- Remote telework for staff when possible
- Employees are encouraged to wash hands after specific actions (restroom, cleaning, eating, etc.)
- Shared tools and equipment sanitized before during and after each shift or when transferred to new employee
- Employees are given clear instructions on how to respond and report to possible cases of COVID on property
- Developed a sophisticated flow chart ('if-then') policy for employees that may interact with COVID + person or display symptoms
- Implemented a staff symptom checking station

Visitor Signage, guidance and messaging

- Exhibit specific walkway stickers (or spray painted) and signage that encourage social distancing
- Public health/handwashing/hygiene signage
- Used animal themed signage to enforce distancing & hygiene
- Phase 1 opening: no brochures or maps available
- QR code on printed tickets which allowed for download of a map to their phone
- Welcomed back with signs and chalk drawings
- Physical distancing signage on exhibits, doors, etc.
- Signage that let guests know of 'high touch points'
- Public Address System messaging safety recommendations
- Abiding by all CDC and State health guidelines
- Personal responsibility of guests noted on signage

Masks

- Encourage guests to wear masks
- Staff wear masks when zoo is open and when there is a chance of guest, animal or staff encounter
- Staff must wear masks
- Facility sells masks
- Requiring all guests wear masks
- Stocks disposable masks available upon public request
- Mandatory state-wide order for all those in public to wear masks
- Employees wear masks, guests are encouraged but not required
- N95 masks provided near select mammals
- In a state where masks are not mandatory, implementing specific times for when all visitors will be required to wear them

- One facility cited that masks must be worn by guests in certain areas

Ticketing

- Timed ticketing
- On-line ticket & or reservations purchasing only (reservations to manage capacity limits)
- On-line ticketing encouraged
- Tickets purchased and printed at home, with a scanner at the gate for touchless entrance
- Encourage cashless transactions for everything
- Credit/debit card only, no cash
- On-line and in person ticketing, staff in mask and gloves

Admissions

- Limiting capacity (most starting 25%)
- Began with zoo members only
- Limiting group sizes to 10 or fewer
- Limiting access to a specific guest number
- Establishing early hours for vulnerable populations
- Special members-only hours
- As Phase considerations are met, guest numbers increase gradually
- Winter rate (reduced admission price)
- Free admission for a time
- Free admissions initially for first responders
- Start with 50% capacity
- Start with 50% outdoor capacity, 25% limited indoor venues

Facility Access

- One way/specific directional pathways
- Rides and play areas closed
- Spacing of chairs, benches or tables to prevent congregation
- Outdoor exhibit access only
- All indoor facilities closed except bathrooms (at least initially)
- Playgrounds and drinking fountains closed
- Food and gifts sold at outdoor kiosks
- Group bathroom doors or other 'touch' doors propped open to reduce touch
- Altering entrance and exit options
- Roped off statuary that people love to climb on
- Initial opening: no guest feeding and animal encounters
- Retail and gift shops and outdoor restaurant seating open
- Public feeding at some exhibits will be open

- Inside store and concessions open
- Picnic option available
- Traditional water fountains closed, refill stations remained open
- As Phase considerations are met, additional indoor exhibits begin to open
- Active monitoring of 'pinch points' by personnel
- Retail store by appt only
- Shows and food service closed until further notice
- Barriers installed to reduce touchpoints where possible
- Elevator use monitored and rider number limited
- Limiting hours of operation to allow more time for cleaning
- Temporarily changed their model to a 'drive through' only opportunity
- No public lockers
- Pet 'hotel' closed
- Rides are being controlled to limit the number of people per carry unit, increasing number of trams/boats to accommodate distancing

General Biosecurity Considerations

- Point of sale areas: vendors are behind glass/plexiglass with specific cleaning instructions
- Developed a survey to assess public perception for safe attendance
- Providing cleaning bottles and towels for guests to wipe down strollers and wagons before and after use
- Self-serve vending closed (penny smash, collectible, etc.)
- Deep cleaning/adding staff to deep clean
- Barriers installed to prevent guests from touching glass enclosures
- Guests encouraged to take their trash home with them
- Garbage cans went lidless to avoid touch during the day
- Glove use limited, hand washing encouraged
- Limit use of hand dryers, patrons use paper towels
- Every other sink in the rest rooms will be closed to encourage distancing
- Frequency of air filter replacement in buildings increased

Animal Specific considerations

- Added additional barriers or taping to exhibits to prevent guests from dropping stuff in, or from coming in close contact with certain species
- PPE worn within 6' of all mammals if necessary to be that close
- Disposable gloves when making animal diets
- Wash hands thoroughly with animal meal prep
- Animal training protocol changes approved by Safety officer
- "Dry cleaning" encouraged as much as possible, with water volume used instead of water pressure/aerosolization

- Footbaths installed
- Discontinue animal contact opportunities

Memberships & Fundraising

- Pushing memberships to support the facility
- Encouraging membership renewal on-line
- Online renewal only of memberships
- Extended memberships to account for closure
- Virtual fundraisers to replace popular in-person events

Rental Considerations

- Events cancelled until further notice
- Corporate events cancelled till mid Sept
- Clients have postponed until 2021
- Booking now into 2021, taking deposits and will refund if 2nd wave
- COVID clause added to rental contracts
- When reopening will follow governor's guidelines and limit to 50
- Plated dinners instead of buffets

Camper considerations

- **No games that require touching (common board games, etc.)**
- Will not be implemented until later phase of recovery
- Limit program numbers to accommodate distancing guidelines
- Solo 'rather than 'partner' activities
- No food service provided, campers bring their own food/snacks
- Delay the starting of the camps until later in the summer
- Move all camp activities outdoors
- Stagger lunch groups

Advice & Lessons Learned

- Your plan needs to be flexible
- Watch how people move through the new zoo and be prepared to change
- ADA challenges can be overcome with messaging and staff assistance
- Mask use is variable depending on state and local mandates
- Enrichment draws crowds. Consider doing that pre-opening or after closing
- Guests were happy to return, and grateful! Thanked staff.
- Mask wearing behavior is quite variable when not required
- Guests did well policing themselves with distancing requirement