



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 31, 2020

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Continuing Public Park Restrictions Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Attached is a memorandum from Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department Director Chris Cawein regarding the above mentioned subject.

We continue to close certain elements of our parks system where we cannot be reasonably assured that compliance with social distancing guidelines can be achieved. We had hoped to keep playgrounds in our parks open. This closure relates to playgrounds and play structures based on the National Recreation and Park Association guidelines.

As of today, Pima County playgrounds and play structures are closed.

CHH/anc

Attachment

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,
Health and Community Services



MEMORANDUM

Date: March 31, 2020

To: CH Huckelberry, County Administrator
Carmine DeBonis, Deputy County Administrator

From: Chris Cawein, Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Cawein". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the right of the "From:" field.

Subject: Closing Playground Structures in Parks

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, our staff have been regularly reexamining the effectiveness of our procedures to comply with CDC and other health agency guidelines designed to reduce the likelihood of disease transmission.

Our overall philosophy has been to try to keep our sites and facilities open to the extent possible, as long as we can reasonably expect conformance to all appropriate public health guidelines. All of our park sites presently remain open per EO2020-12 though we are closing certain amenities within those parks where we cannot be reasonably assured that compliance with disease transmission prevention guidelines can be achieved. Our strategy has been as follows:

1. Cancelling Department-sponsored activities and events that result in assembly of members of the public in close proximity in both indoor and outdoor settings;
2. Closing of indoor facilities where numerous people may gather;
3. Installing signage in heavily-used outdoor venues to remind park users of the basic requirements for using good hygiene and for social distancing. To date, that has included restrooms and playgrounds, as well as dog parks. We have also installed social distancing reminders on Park Rule and Loop Guideline signs throughout the County;
4. Closing facilities that do not have adequate space that allows for proper social distancing. To date, those facilities have included ramadas and dugouts;
5. Regularly disinfecting those facilities in parks that have hard surfaces that numerous individuals may touch over the course of a day and that therefore could be a factor in facilitating disease transmission. To date, those have included restrooms and playgrounds; and,
6. Regularly evaluating the activities within our open park facilities as they become more heavily used and making necessary and appropriate adjustments based on usage patterns. Those adjustments may include adding additional signage locations such as at popular trailheads, where social distancing may not be readily adhered to or possibly instituting additional closures, if signage does not have the desired impact.

As you are aware, recently we began a disinfection protocol for playground structures in our park facilities. That disinfection schedule was instituted based on the extent of use of that structure with a disinfectant selected that retained a residual disinfecting capability. We recognized that although the solution was imperfect, we believed that it was a reasonable and prudent measure to reduce the potential for disease transmission from these hard-surfaced structures frequently utilized by many young park patrons.

As we have observed and as I reported to you in my most recent memo, our park system is being more heavily used as people look to find opportunities to get outside, exercise and recreate as many other types of facilities have been closed. We have continued to move methodically through our facilities and have closed down ramadas and other social gathering spots where it is unlikely or where we observe that recommended social distancing guidelines of 6 feet or greater cannot be easily adhered to.

Over the past few weeks, and especially over the past few days, as our parks continue to become a respite for homebound residents, NRPR staff have observed that our playgrounds are exhibiting a pattern of increased use. Just in the past few days, we have observed groups of multiple children playing on playground structures at several of our park sites. Most playgrounds are relatively small structures. Although we believe that our recently-enacted disinfection protocol is an effective step in helping to prevent disease transmission from these hard surfaces, the presence of multiple children on playground structures at a given time creates a situation where person-to-person transmission is possible. We are observing that recommended social distancing guidelines of 6 feet are not being readily followed. Given that many experts agree that airborne transmission of disease may be more problematic than touch transmission via an impacted hard surface, we believe it prudent to advance the temporary closure of all playground structures in County parks.

This recommendation aligns with National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Guidelines (attached) and mirrors what many communities are doing around the Country to reduce the potential for community spread of disease and is a logical enhancement of our risk reduction strategy in our public parks. Locally, although there is currently a mixed message with Oro Valley having already closed their playgrounds but the City of Tucson and Marana not having yet done so, they both appear to be heading in that direction this week based in part on the NRPR guidelines.

Unless otherwise instructed, I will ask our staff to advance closing our 114 playgrounds in our public parks by wrapping them with a single strand of caution tape this week to assist in further reducing the potential for community spread of disease.

Attachment

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The National Recreation and Park Association Statement on Playgrounds and Play Structures During COVID-19 Pandemic

(March 30, 2020)

Nationally, more cities and states have implemented shelter in place orders, closed schools and businesses, and taken crucial measures to protect public health and slow the spread of COVID-19. As these changes in policy and practice have been implemented, many questions regarding the safety of public playgrounds and play structures have emerged.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) understands the important value playgrounds and play structures provide to communities across the country, especially for children. But, given the current situation and the guidance from public health officials on physical distancing, limiting in-person social interactions, avoiding spaces where people congregate in close quarters, and the concerns around transmission of the virus being spread through surfaces, we believe that playgrounds and play structures should temporarily close in an effort to reduce community spread.

Many communities have already taken steps to close these spaces, including

- Posting signage
- Wrapping equipment in hazard tape
- Making public service announcements
- Locking permanent fencing gates or installing temporary fencing

NRPA fully supports these decisions and efforts to protect public safety. However, we recognize these decisions involve a number of factors and should be made at the local level — consulting with public health officials and based on the local risk assessment.

While we believe that playgrounds and play structures should close, NRPA continues to support keeping parks, trails, and green spaces that provide adequate room for physical distancing open for the public to use in responsible ways that protect public health and safety. Through this pandemic, local parks, trails and open spaces have become even more of a haven and place of respite from the stresses of daily life and the uncertainty we face. We know the physical and mental health benefits that these spaces provide and urge them to remain open wherever possible.

NRPA recommends all park and recreation agencies monitor and adhere to the guidance of local, state and national public health officials to take proper steps in ensuring public safety in their parks, trails and open spaces, as outlined in our *Joint Statement on Using Parks and Open Space While Maintaining Physical Distancing* that is supported by more than 1,000 organizations nationwide.

About the National Recreation and Park Association

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that all people have access to parks and recreation for health, conservation and social equity. Through its network of 60,000 recreation and park professionals and advocates, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles, conservation initiatives and equitable access to parks and public space. For more information, visit www.nrpa.org. For digital access to NRPA's flagship publication, *Parks & Recreation*, visit www.parksandrecreation.org.