
MDM Observatory in the Era of COVID-19

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Safety First

While MDM is a minimally-staffed facility, there are still a number of visitors that come and go, as well as staff from KPNO who regularly visit our facilities. It is paramount from an operational and safety standpoint that certain provisions be added or amended in the era of COVID-19. The intent of this document is to outline procedures taken on-site by MDM staff to better ensure a working and living environment that is as safe as possible for staff and visitors alike.



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COVID-19 and What We Know

- COVID-19 is a new (novel) disease. We continue to learn more about how it spreads and the severity of its associated illness. As more information becomes available, safety protocols may be adjusted.
- COVID-19 is primarily spread when person-to-person proximity is close, within 6', and respiratory droplets from coughing, sneezing, or even talking are dispersed. It is also possible that the virus is spread through indirect contact by touching a contaminated surface and then touching the face (mouth, nose, eyes, ears).
- Currently, there are a number of vaccines available and more and more of the population are being vaccinated every day.
- MDM Observatory will follow or surpass all CDC, Federal, State, Tohono O'Odham, UArizona, University of Michigan and NOIRlab (formerly NOAO) safety directives and policies.

NOIR/KPNO COVID-19 Exposure Prevention Plan (CEPP)

- NOIR/KPNO have released documentation related to the planning involved with bringing the mountain as a whole back up to normal operational status. While MDM is essentially isolated from other mountain facilities, it is important to appreciate that we are responsible for our well-being and for staying away from other mountain staff as much as possible. All of these documents can be accessed through links on the MDM covid-19 response page as well as from the links below. Some key points to be aware of follow:

- A [webpage](#) has been set up to detail the various metrics utilized for planning what level of support will be available at KPNO.
- A phone number, (520) 318-8010, has also been set up to provide daily updates to the status of operations at KPNO.
- NOIR/KPNO have also implemented some additional protocols—COVID-19 Exposure Prevention Plan (CEPP)—that are required for any access to the mountain. It must also be understood that any MDM visitors are limited to MDM grounds unless other arrangements have been made prior to arrival on the mountain. There is no travel to the summit for MDM visitors currently. This will remain in effect until further notice.
- Prior to arrival on the mountain, the following three videos must be viewed. Afterwards, all visitors will be required to verify that they have viewed these videos by sending email to the [MDM Site Manager](#). The videos are as follows:
 - [Coronavirus Exposure Prevention Plan Training Part I v.2](#) (running time, 4:29)
 - [Coronavirus Exposure Prevention Plan Training Part II v.2](#) (running time, 7:13)
 - [Coronavirus Exposure Prevention Training Plan Part III v.2](#) (running time, 7:05)
- Prior to any visit to MDM, authorization must be granted via the [Site Manager](#). Every person accessing any portion of Kitt Peak is required to fill out the following form either prior to arrival or immediately upon arrival. This is also required any time a visit is made to the NOIRlab base facilities in Tucson. Failure to file this form with NOIRlab can lead to subsequent access restrictions immediately. The intent of this form is to facilitate the ability to perform contact tracing in the event of any covid19 cases. All visitors and staff alike will be required to submit this form.
 - [Daily NOIRLab Kitt Peak site access form](#)

Changes Made for MDM Staff, Visitors & Facilities

Before Arriving at MDM

- Safety first! If a person is not comfortable or does not feel safe in any job assignment, let the [Site Manager](#) know. We can address the situation accordingly.
- If an employee/visitor is at all sick, they are expected to stay at home or in town. Health should be monitored and return to normal prior to consideration of returning to work. Return to work must be processed through the Site Manager.
- Staff/visitors shall perform self-wellness checks daily. Prior to leaving for the mountain, ask the following questions:
 1. In the last 24 hours, have you had or developed a fever, cough, chest pain or shortness of breath?
 2. Is any member of your household sick with a respiratory infection or any of the symptoms above?
 3. Have you been in close contact with a confirmed positive COVID-19 individual?

If the answer to any of these questions is YES, do not travel to MDM. Notify the [Site Manager](#) that you are sick, then contact your primary care physician (PCP) as appropriate.

Upon Arriving at MDM

- Upon arriving at MDM Observatory, or at least once per day, each employee or visitor will undergo a brief daily wellness check, as described below on [page 8](#).
- Frequently washing hands with soap and water for at minimum 20 seconds is imperative.

- Coughing and sneezing is to be done into the elbow or a tissue, not hand. Regardless, hands will be washed after such events.
- Surgical masks and gloves will be stocked on-site and readily available.
- As of 11Apr2022, use of face masks is optional as long as all parties are fully vaccinated and in agreement. Visitors must confirm vaccination status to the [Site Manager](#), otherwise face masks will still be deemed a requirement. Disposable masks will be available. The option of fabricating a reusable mask per guidance from the [U.S. Surgeon General](#) or [CDC](#) is also possible. Masks will help mitigate direct and indirect exposure by catching droplets from the mouth and nose before they can enter the local environment. Wash hands before applying or removing masks. Ensure the mask completely covers the mouth and nose. Masks are not a substitute for distancing or hygiene practices!
- Regularly used surfaces/materials will be cleaned and disinfected according to [CDC guidelines](#) regularly, and at a minimum twice per work day. Disinfecting wipes will be on-site and available to staff and visitors. Some examples of such surfaces are workstations, keyboard & mouse, desks, tables, countertops, door handles, light switches, handles, phones, toilets, faucets and interior vehicle surfaces. If cleaning supplies need to be restocked, contact the [Site Manager](#).
- Effort should be made to dispose of PPE- and disinfecting-related refuse in the marked waste receptacles found in the shop area at each facility. These cans will be bagged and emptied daily.
- Physical distancing of no less than 6' will be required at all times. As mandated by UM protocols, square footage requirements limit room occupancy to one person for every 144 square feet. Any exceptions must be approved by the [Site Manager](#).

Travel to & Staying at MDM

- MDM vehicle use is starting to become more widely available. However, do not assume vehicle use is guaranteed—plan to rent a vehicle, and as always, consult with the [Site Manager](#).
- Company vehicle occupancies will be limited. Visitors cannot share rides with staff. Vehicle surfaces will be wiped down using supplied materials after any use.
- For visitors with complete vaccinations or negative testing, shared vehicle use is left to the discretion of the visitors.
- Two-way radios can be found in the control rooms at each telescope. In the event of an emergency, the summit can also be reached by switching to channel 1.
- MDM dormitory rooms will be limited to one person per room. HVAC filters will be cleaned. Staff, utilizing PPE materials and procedures, will check each dorm room between uses to ensure their upkeep. Visitors should vet room choice with the Site Manager.
- Kitchen facility use will be handled on a case-by-case basis, typically limited to use by the visitor only.
- Suspected or positive cases of those who have been working on-site will be reported to the Site Manager and Director for viral tracing purposes.
- Anyone with possible symptoms of/exposure to COVID-19 should follow the information provided by [Pima County](#).

Useful Resources and Links

While this document should provide ample direction for pursuing a safe and healthy transition back to an open and operational Observatory, there are of course numerous other avenues available for getting further or more detailed information. Below is a list of some such resources.

- [General information from the Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) regarding COVID-19.](#)
- [CDC guidelines for reusable face coverings.](#)
- [CDC guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting.](#)
- For staff, the University of Michigan (UM) has set up a comprehensive list of resources and services available. Be sure to check this [link](#) often for updates.
- For UM information specific to faculty & staff [counseling and consultation.](#)
- State of Arizona COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- [Pima County information regarding exposure to COVID-19.](#)
- City of Tucson COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- University of Arizona COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- MDM Observatory COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- NOIRlab COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- Dartmouth College COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- Columbia University COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- The Ohio State University COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- Ohio University COVID-19 [updates.](#)
- Contact the [Site Manager](#) for any questions, comments or concerns.

Daily Wellness Check Protocol

While we are a small group at MDM, it is still imperative to the safety and well-being of the Observatory that health and wellness be monitored on a daily basis for the foreseeable future. The following checklist will apply to staff as well as all visitors who access MDM facilities.

1. In the last 24 hours, have you had or developed a fever, cough, chest pain or shortness of breath?
2. Is any member of your household sick with a respiratory infection?
3. Have you been in close contact (within 6' for 15 or more minutes) with a confirmed positive COVID-19 patient?

If the employee or visitor answers YES to question 1, the employee or visitor may be asked to either self-isolate or possibly depart the facilities to head to Tucson where medical facilities are available. For visitors, staff may work to assist in finding an appropriate place to remain isolated while awaiting results. Staff will remain in frequent contact with the affected employee or visitor. The MDM Site Manager will work with the affected employee or visitor in order to establish contact tracing to determine the level of impact to other staff or visitors.

If the employee or visitor answers YES to question 2 or 3, MDM will likely require the person to quarantine for 14 days. Appropriate consortium members will be brought in to assist with the proper way to deal with such a request.

Summary

Returning to work may feel like a welcome and refreshing return to normalcy. And it should as it marks a milestone in actions taken to continue on after this pandemic. That said, it may seem at times that the protocols detailed above are overbearing or obtrusive. Remember that they are not put into place without thought. All actions are meant to reduce the chance of negatively impacting your health as well as the health of those who report day after day to MDM Observatory. We all appreciate the mutual efforts undertaken by all to keep the risk of viral transfer as low as possible. Please feel free to reach out to the [Site Manager](#) with any questions, comments or concerns.