



# Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory 2021 COVID-19 Playbook

*Adopted Administratively April 9, 2021*

Dear RMBL Researchers, Students and Staff,

Welcome to summer 2021! RMBL adopted the following operating procedures to keep you healthy and minimize disruption to research and education.

Please read this playbook carefully prior to your arrival. It contains important information about what you'll need to bring to RMBL and new protocols you'll be expected to follow this summer.

Note that we are moving the administrative office to the Barclay classroom building. Staff to assist with check-in and check-out will be available there. We ask that all individuals maintain at least six feet of distancing from staff during check-in.

Questions after reading this playbook? Contact Brett Biebuyck, Director of Administration, [brett@rmb.org](mailto:brett@rmb.org) or Kelly Sudderth, Chief Operating Officer [kelly@rmb.org](mailto:kelly@rmb.org).

We can't wait to see you!

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## INTRODUCTION

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**Purpose of this document.** This is a living document that will guide operational decisions and activities throughout the coronavirus pandemic. This document is meant to be a “playbook” to:

- Establish a framework for operating during the pandemic, including goals and protocols;
- Provide transparency and accountability for staff and community members.

If changes are made, they will be communicated to the RMBL staff in staff meetings and to the larger RMBL community in the weekly e-bulletin, using email and physical signs if more urgent communications are needed. Questions, ideas or concerns may be presented at any time to the Director of Administration, [brett@rmbll.org](mailto:brett@rmbll.org).

**Goals.** We have adopted the following goals:

1. Avoid a Gothic-based outbreak;
2. Protect individuals, especially unvaccinated individuals with vulnerabilities;
3. Enable research and education activities, with a focus on early career scientists and long-term projects.

Given the number of people we anticipate visiting Gothic and the opportunities to bring the virus in from the outside, success will not be defined by zero cases in Gothic. We were fortunate to achieve that in 2020 but consider it unrealistic to expect that in 2021. However, if a case does reach Gothic, we want to make certain it does not spread, and to do our best to help vulnerable individuals. We will also balance safety measures with our mission of supporting research and education.

**Development and Modification of this Playbook.** RMBL’s staff has developed this playbook within the context of policies established by RMBL’s Board. If circumstances change, such as the emergence of a variant or an outbreak in the local community, we may move quickly to introduce additional measures to reduce the potential for spread. However, we are unlikely to loosen operating procedures unless there is overwhelming evidence and support for such a move, even if restrictions in Gunnison County are otherwise loosened.

### Summary of Major Decisions

- Because current vaccines are approved through an emergency use authorization, RMBL will not use vaccination status as a criterion for accepting an individual nor in prioritizing space.
- There will be no restrictions on housing for vaccinated individuals, two weeks from their first shot.
- We will offer up to 15 tents for housing.
- We will continue to require face masks.
- We will not allow people to enter the bbcc, common labs, classrooms or natural history building for 7 days after arrival from outside the county, regardless of vaccination status.

- Indoor programs will be limited to 15 or fewer individuals.
- PI's must have their own covid plans for how their research groups will operate.
- We will operate the Visitor's Center and Coffee Lab and we will offer a public porta potty along Gothic Road. Public access to Gothic will otherwise be restricted.
- We will host some K-12 programs in Gothic, limiting group size to 15 people or less.
- RMBL will provide grocery delivery services from City Market in Gunnison to Gothic and South Gothic residents.
- The dining hall will offer take-out food services, and we will likely offer buffet serving and/or indoor seating with social distancing.
- We will waive parking fees.
- We will require symptomatic individuals to be tested within 24 hours, or as soon as is feasible. Testing will not be provided by RMBL but is offered by the Gunnison County Health Department and various local medical clinics.
- We will de-emphasize the importance of fomite/surface transmission.
- We will not limit carpooling but encourage people to wear masks and ventilate the vehicle.
- We will not schedule groups or cabins for the shower house, but the Johnson lab shower will be limited to use by unvaccinated and/or vulnerable individuals. Those individuals can coordinate use and scheduling with the admin office.
- Common labs may be reserved for private use by unvaccinated individuals through the Science Director.

**We will do our best to serve scientists and undergraduate researchers.** RMBL is here for scientists and students. Because the pandemic limits our ability to offer and support a "normal" field season we will prioritize research and education over other activities. Within research space allocations, we will follow existing guidelines (research code, housing guidelines) for prioritization of space, with flexibility for staff to adapt to the unique circumstances, *honoring the intent established in existing prioritization standards with an eye toward protecting scientists in early career stages and long-term projects.*

**New norms, new expectations.** Communities all over are establishing new norms and expectations for how we care for each other. Traditional aspects of life in Gothic –seminars, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1/3 marathon, and cabin dance parties – will be postponed until we can safely gather in large(r) groups. Through all of this, creating and nurturing an environment of trust and forgiveness is essential. ***We will not get everything right, and the best way to get through this together will be to trust that we did the best we could at the time.***

**We're in this together.** We are each responsible for the health and safety of the RMBL community. If people stay healthy and follow the protocols, everyone will be able to do more this summer. We have an obligation to protect our colleagues and friends by following social distancing and hygiene protocols.

**Safety is non-negotiable.** We will follow the recommendations and guidelines issued by public health officials and/or infectious disease experts so as not to expose our staff and visitors to unacceptable health risks. We will do our best to prevent an outbreak in Gothic, or if one occurs, to contain it.

**Mental health matters.** We know that prolonged isolation is difficult and also that many community members are dealing with loss. And we know that summers in Gothic are a special time. We welcome RMBL community members to try creative virtual and distance ways of connecting. We ask that you proactively reach out if you are struggling, contacting a staff member as well as any friends. We can't help you if we don't know you need help.

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### *PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS & RMBL'S REQUIREMENTS*

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RMBL operates under the jurisdiction of Gunnison County. Legally, we must comply with public health orders issued by Gunnison County and the State of Colorado. At times we may decide it is in RMBL's best interests to implement more restrictive measures than those required by the County or State. If/when we do so, we will explain the rationale for our decision.

Individuals will only be allowed to live and/or work at/through RMBL if they agree to abide by our operational plan. RMBL understands that individuals have the right to engage in activities not allowed in this operational plan. However, because such activities may put the larger scientific community at risk, we reserve the right to refuse service to anybody. Those services include, but are not limited to, housing at RMBL, access to RMBL laboratory space or equipment, working on RMBL property, working on federal lands through RMBL's special use permits, and accessing private property through permission obtained by RMBL.

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### *COMMUNICATION OF RISKS AND VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS*

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Please be aware of the risks of working at RMBL and the risks of traveling to Gunnison County. One of the most common serious complications associated with Covid19 is a struggle to breathe. Gunnison's high elevation and low oxygen levels only make this worse. Furthermore, Gunnison County has one hospital with a limited number of beds and no intensive care unit. RMBL will take particular care in housing unvaccinated individuals who self-identify as being vulnerable to covid-19. However, because our housing capacity is limited we will prioritize single housing for unvaccinated individuals. Vaccinated individuals who desire single rooms or their own cabins, unless they have had such housing before the pandemic, should consider obtaining housing offsite, or even whether it is appropriate for them to be working at RMBL.

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## *PROTOCOLS APPLICABLE TO ALL ACTIVITIES*

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The following protocols are applicable to all activities in the Gothic townsite. Exemptions may be approved by the Chief Operating Officer.

### **FACE MASKS**

Masks must be worn indoors in all common areas and outside where it is impractical to maintain social distancing unless removal of masks is necessary for eating or for science. Non-medical masks are acceptable, ideally double layered, tightly woven, and washable fabric. RMBL will provide masks for staff, but all other individuals must provide their own masks.

### **SOCIAL DISTANCING EXPECTATIONS**

Individuals shall:

- Maintain at least a six-foot distance from individuals, unless research protocols require closer contact, and additional appropriate measures for safety are used (e.g. vaccinated individuals, PPE is used);
- Cover coughs or sneezes into the sleeve or elbow, not hands;

### **GROUP SIZE & SOCIAL GATHERINGS**

Indoor group sizes will be limited to 15 or fewer people for research and education activities and 10 or fewer people for social activities, regardless of vaccination status. Social gatherings within cabins will only be allowed in cabins in which all residents are vaccinated.

### **LIMITING NONESSENTIAL TRIPS TO/FROM GOTHIC/DOWN VALLEY**

We recommend that individuals living and working in Gothic minimize eating indoors at restaurants, visiting bars, or attending large events (indoors or outdoors). If there is a community outbreak we may move to more restrictive measures on short notice.

### **ISOLATION UPON ARRIVAL IN GOTHIC**

Upon arrival from outside the state and for 7 days afterwards, individuals, regardless of vaccination status, will be required to stay out of common use labs, not enter the dining hall, classrooms or natural history building and stay out cabins in which they are not living. They must maintain a distance of at least six feet from all individuals when traveling outside.

### **VEHICLES**

To support social distancing requirements and our compartmentalization strategy, we will waive parking fees. We encourage people to be thoughtful when traveling with non-vaccinated individuals (e.g., wear masks and roll windows down for ventilation).

### **ENFORCEMENT**

All staff, Gothic residents and other RMBL visitors (including researchers residing elsewhere in the valley) are expected to comply with these protocols. Researchers and students who

disregard these protocols may be asked to leave. The Chief Operating Officer or Director of Administration will initially handle all disciplinary actions (including verbal and/or written warnings) and the Executive Director will make final decisions if a community member is asked to leave. While in most circumstances we will provide a warning and an opportunity for an individual to correct their behavior, we reserve the right to immediately dismiss an individual if they wantonly put others at risk, or their behavior seriously threatens the health and integrity of the community.

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### *LAB GROUP SAFETY PLANS*

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Each lab group must develop and file their own coronavirus safety plan with the Science Director. RMBL will not assume responsibility or liability resulting from the protocols in those plans. If necessary, for the conduct of research, limited exceptions to social distancing requirements for unvaccinated individuals who are not in the same household will be considered by the Chief Operating Officer, but only where other safety and health considerations are at risk. Lab group fieldwork plans must comply with whatever public health orders are currently in place.

Items to be addressed in each lab's safety plan include the following:

- Interactions between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals?
- Travel to field sites: How will lab team members travel to field sites? If carpooling will take place, will any measures be taken, such as opening windows, to reduce transmission.
- Social Distancing and research activities: How will social distancing be managed during field work? If social distancing involving an unvaccinated individual is not always possible, please explain the situation and how PPE will be used. This situation must be approved in advance by the Chief Operating Officer.

If clarification is needed, for example, difficulties maintaining social distancing while safely handling animals or other types of sampling, please contact the Director of Administration or the Science Director.

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### *COMMON AREAS*

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**Washers/dryers.** Multiple individuals can utilize the laundry machines at one time, but only one person should be in the laundry room at a time.

**Domestic kitchen in the billy barr community center.** The domestic kitchen will only be open to vaccinated individuals, though the Director of Administration may make exceptions for unvaccinated individuals who have not self-identified as vulnerable.

**Johnson lab shower.** The Johnson lab shower will be limited to use by unvaccinated and/or vulnerable individuals. Those individuals can coordinate use and scheduling with the admin office.

**Washhouse.** Use of the washhouse will be open and unrestricted.

**Common Labs:** Common labs will be open to four people at a time, though isolated use by unvaccinated individuals may be scheduled through the Science Director.

**Outhouses and Bathrooms:** Use will be open and unrestricted. We will provide an outhouse for public use on Gothic road, and the outhouse at the Barclay classroom building will not be open to the public.

**Classrooms:** The classrooms in Barclay will be open. Occupancy in a single classroom will be 15 or fewer individuals. When weather permits, the windows should be open for ventilation.

**Visitor Center:** The Visitor Center will be staffed and open to the public. Occupancy in the building will be limited to 15 or fewer individuals. Masks will be required for entry. Visitor center staff will lead public tours, focusing on the SAIL installation in the Research Meadow, and along Gothic Road and above Ruby Lounge.

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### *RESIDENCY IN GOTHIC*

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- RMBL will use the existing housing policy to determinize prioritization for housing. In the case that individuals have the same priority under the housing policy, priority will be given to early career scientists and/or long-term research projects.
- There will be no restrictions on housing for vaccinated individuals, two weeks from the first shot.
- Unvaccinated individuals within a family or a relationship can share rooms.
- Unvaccinated individuals outside a family/relationship can share a room only by permission of the Chief Operating Officer or Executive Director and permission will only be granted if all individuals to share a room agree, if none of the individuals self-identify as being vulnerable to the virus, and if RMBL determines the social networks of individuals sharing a room are not likely to cause undue risk of community spread in the case of an infection.
- Vaccinated individuals who request single housing based on being vulnerable will be granted single housing following the existing housing policy guidelines, which means that many individuals will be low priority for single rooms.
- To the greatest extent practical, isolated housing (which may be offsite or onsite), consisting of at least a private room, will be provided for individuals for which there is

reasonable cause to believe they are infected, including but not limited to a positive test, symptoms such as loss of smell/taste that are predictive of infection, and exposure to an infected individual combined with symptoms consistent with infection.

- Isolated individuals will not be allowed in common use areas, including the dining hall and labs.
- Gothic residents may be asked to move multiple times during summer to accommodate isolation, changing vaccination status, and complicated housing scenarios.
- RMBL will not provide linens.

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### *DINING*

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We will follow all Gunnison County public health orders for restaurants for food service in Gothic, and potentially be more restrictive. We will only serve Gothic residents, with no general sign-ups by the public, though you may request approval for a guest by the Director Administration, COO, or Executive Director. We will provide indoor seating with social distancing, and takeout will be offered.

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### *GROCERIES, MATERIALS & SUPPLIES PROCUREMENT, MAIL & PACKAGES & PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION*

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**Groceries.** RMBL will organize grocery pickup and delivery from City Market in Gunnison, using their “ClickList” service or taking advantage of Sysco deliveries. For ClickList service, researchers will order and pay online and schedule pickup within a pre-determined window. Based on demand, we will establish several “windows” per week. RMBL staff will pick up the groceries and deliver to the researchers’ cabin. Researchers will need to be present at their cabin to accept delivery.

**Materials & Supplies.** RMBL staff make trips to town five days/week (Monday-Friday) for mail pickup and town errands. We will pick up supplies from Ace Hardware and Alpine Lumber if researchers organize ordering and payment ahead of time.

**Mail & Package Delivery.** Unvaccinated individuals who self-identify as vulnerable may request mail delivery to cabins.

**Transportation.** There will not be a public bus running between the local towns and Gothic. Contact the office for updates on whether other transportation is available.

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*APPENDIX 1: RMBL Board Strategy, adopted April 4, 2021*

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To: RMBL Board of Trustees  
From: Dan Blumstein, Bruce McLean, Amy Iler, Ken Williams, Ian Billick, and Kelly Sudderth  
Date: April 2, 2021  
RE: Proposed Board-level covid-19 policy

Below we propose a board-level covid-19 policy. The intent is to set high-level guidelines for how RMBL will operate in 2021. If adopted, staff will have the authority to adopt more stringent measures, but that more open policies only be allowed in consultation with Bruce McLean (Chair) and Dan Blumstein (President), either of whom can request full board review before an amendment is allowed. Additionally, we recommend that once we establish our operational policy, if circumstances justify it (e.g., a community outbreak, emergence of variants), we reserve the right to institute a more restrictive policy quickly. However, we will be slow to relax policies unless the evidence and support for such policies is overwhelming.

#### Goals

We propose the following three goals:

4. Avoid a Gothic-based outbreak;
5. Protect individuals, especially unvaccinated individuals with vulnerabilities;
6. Enable research and education activities, with a focus on early career scientists and long-term projects.

We recommend that success not be defined by zero cases in Gothic. We were fortunate to achieve that in 2020 but consider that it unrealistic to expect that in 2021.

#### Context

- We had no infections in Gothic in 2020 with maximum occupancy reaching about 105.
- Last summer Crested Butte experienced a wave of infections at the end of July/early August in 2020.
- Gunnison County infection rates are currently low, with a positivity rate that in March and April has been ranging between 1-5% (at the time of the memo).
- Gunnison County vaccinations are running ahead of the national average.
- We expect that by the end of May all willing adults in the US will have been vaccinated.
- Survey data of the RMBL community suggests little evidence of individuals who will not become vaccinated because of health, personal, or religious reasons.
- The county believes it will achieve Colorado's green status by May, which will remove almost all restrictions on the county.

#### Housing

- We have legal approval for housing 180 individuals.
- We have 104 bedrooms.
- Last year we reached peak capacity at about 105, holding back 8 bedrooms for isolation.

- We expect demand to be closer to 180 than 105.
- We have moved 10 undergraduate research positions offsite to reduce housing demand.
- We will add 15 tents into the housing mix.
- Our best prediction (assuming we start with peak demand at 175 based on past history, subtract 10 students who are offsite, and then remove 15 individuals because of travel restrictions) is that demand will be about 150. With 104 bedrooms and 15 tents, we would need to have 62 individuals in shared bedrooms to meet likely demand (or 122 individuals to reach 180).

### Recommended Policies

- RMBL's operating policies will be consistent with all legal requirements deriving from public health orders and laws related to the virus. If anything in the board or operational policy is determined to be inconsistent with legal requirements, RMBL shall adhere to the legal requirements.
- Because of the potential negative impacts of an outbreak on research and educational activities, RMBL will be cautious and slow to relax restrictions, even if allowed by local public health and the CDC. Furthermore, while RMBL will potentially respond to outbreaks by quickly introducing more restrictions, RMBL will not relax restrictions set in our operating plan unless there is overwhelming evidence and support for relaxing restrictions.
- RMBL will strongly discourage mixing in the local community, with a focus on avoiding indoor dining, bars, and large gatherings.
- Because current vaccines are approved through an emergency use authorization, RMBL will not use vaccination status as a criteria for accepting an individual nor in prioritizing space.
- RMBL will use the existing housing policy to determinize prioritization for housing. In the case that individuals have the same priority under the housing policy, priority will be given to early career scientists and/or long-term research projects.
- There will be no restrictions on housing for vaccinated individuals, two weeks from the first shot.
- Unvaccinated individuals within a family or a relationship can share rooms.
- Unvaccinated individuals outside a family/relationship can share a room only by permission of the COO or ED and permission will only be granted if all individuals to share a room agree, if none of the individuals self-identify as being vulnerable to the virus, and if RMBL determines the social networks of individuals sharing a room are not likely to cause undue risk of community spread in the case of an infection.
- Vaccinated individuals who request single housing based on being vulnerable will be granted single housing following the existing housing policy guidelines, which means that many individuals will be low priority for single rooms.
- To the greatest extent practical, isolated housing (which may be offsite or onsite), consisting of at least a private room, will be provided for individuals for which there is reasonable cause to believe they are infected, including but not limited to a positive test, symptoms such as loss of smell/taste that are predictive of infection, and exposure to an infected individual combined with symptoms consistent with infection. Isolated individuals will not be allowed in common use areas, including the dining hall and labs.
- Gothic residents may be asked to move multiple times during summer to accommodate isolation, changing vaccination status, and complicated housing scenarios.
- We will require masks in indoor common use areas unless eating, removal of masks necessary for science, or alone.
- We will require masks outdoors if in areas where it is impractical to maintain social distancing unless eating or removal of masks is necessary for science.

- RMBL will take a conservative approach to indoor dining, within the guardrails that we will not allow indoor dining at the bbcc above the capacity allowed by county public health or what is sufficient for appropriate social distancing.
- We will not allow people to enter the bbcc or common labs for 7 days after arrival from outside the county, regardless of vaccination status.
- Mixing from outside the community will be limited by not allowing open public meals in the dining hall, not allowing public use of Gothic bathrooms (though we may provide a public porta-potty), limiting public tours to outdoors away from scientists and students, and limiting youth science programs to small cohorts with no drop-ins.
- RMBL will have broad discretion, within the framework above, to make additional decisions needed to achieve our goals, and to adapt to changing public health recommendations and/or requirements.
- Indoor gatherings will be managed conservatively; indoor programs will be limited to 15 or fewer individuals, except with sufficient space more individuals may be served food in the dining hall at the same time.
- PI's must have their own covid plans for how their research groups will operate, with an emphasis on managing interactions in research settings. The plans must be consistent with RMBL's operational plan unless a waiver is granted by RMBL in writing.