

## **2022 COVID-19 Policy**

May 17, 2022

Dear RMBL Community,

Before the start of summer, we wish to clarify what you can expect about how we will be managing COVID-19, as well as signal how we might react to a changing environment. We will host people from across the world who have had fundamentally different pandemic experiences. Some community members have lost family members and/or have been struggling with isolation and loss. Many have experienced profound financial distress. Others have largely been insulated from negative effects.

We ask that you after you read this policy that you decide whether you are comfortable living and working in the RMBL community this summer. Everybody has a different risk tolerance and there are many ways to approach the summer that are neither right nor wrong. If you decide you are uncomfortable with our approach, please contact Brett Biebuyck as quickly as possible to alter your reservations. We will waive any change/cancellation fees for two weeks after this memo is released to the community. After the grace period has passed, you will be subject to the standard cancellation and change fees.

For perspective, you will be coming to a resort community with many international travelers and thus experienced one of the highest infection rates early in the pandemic. Since then, we have had an unusually low mortality rate, likely in part because our community demographics skew towards a younger and active community. Additionally, our schools closed quickly after the emergence of the virus but have been fully open without interruption through all of 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. With a tourism economy focused on outdoor experiences, and in line with the broader trend of more people choosing to spend time away from urban areas, we have experienced dramatic and challenging amounts of population growth in the valley. The resulting rising real estate prices have tightened the labor market, so many businesses are struggling to staff their operations.

RMBL has been quite fortunate. Almost uniquely for field stations, RMBL operated at 60% capacity in 2020 and logged our highest number of use days ever in 2021. Almost miraculously in both summers we had no recorded instances of covid infections in Gothic, and no evidence of transmission among our summer residents. While we aspire to zero cases this summer, we consider it more likely than not that we will see cases, given the transmission rates with the new virus, even among vaccinated individuals.

With this background in mind, here is what you can expect this summer.

1. RMBL requires community members living in or accessing RMBL facilities to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (2 Pfizer shots, 2 Moderna shots, or 1 Johnson and Johnson shot, with other vaccines allowed for international visitors based upon a case-by-case review). Previous COVID-19 infections do not substitute for vaccine requirements.
2. Vaccine exemptions will be considered as required by law. Our analysis is that there are very few legally required exemptions, if any.
3. We recommend, but do not require, that onsite residents obtain boosters as recommended by health agencies. **CDC:** [COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Shots | CDC](#).
4. RMBL housing has been assigned based on the [RMBL housing assignment policy](#). We are the fullest we have ever been and shared housing will be full.
5. We will have very limited ability to isolate individuals, capacity which could be quickly overwhelmed with any kind of significant outbreak. RMBL will not guarantee that our housing will provide isolation from exposure, nor will we take any responsibility for housing individuals offsite in case of an outbreak.
6. Individuals may request in writing waivers of cancellation fees, which we will grant if we determine at our discretion that a cancellation of onsite housing is caused by sharing tight quarters with someone who has tested positive for covid.
7. Students in our undergraduate program who are receiving support from RMBL equivalent to half of the costs of the program or more (including RMBL scholarship students or students funded through RMBL's REU site program) may request financial assistance for travel or housing costs to ensure appropriate isolation. Such requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
8. Masks will not be required for indoor spaces. However, we reserve the right to require masks in shared indoor spaces at our full discretion, including but not limited to if we determine it appropriate based upon elevated transmission levels in the larger community or in Gothic.
9. We will allow a limited number of public visitors to the dining hall, primarily but not necessarily exclusively at lunch. We will become less or more restrictive based upon how we evaluate local transmission rates.
10. We will not offer public tours of shared indoor facilities of the Gothic Research Center through the Visitor's Center program, though we may occasionally provide small tours in shared indoor facilities as part of maintaining important stakeholder relationships. When we conduct such tours, we will minimize visiting labs that are actively being used.
11. We will conduct public tours through the Visitors Center in outdoors spaces, minimizing time spent in areas heavily trafficked by scientists and/or needed to access facilities or research plots (e.g., avoiding having tours congregate close to the entrances of the Gothic Research Center).
12. We will run K-12 education programs, including using indoor spaces with appropriate caution.

13. We made several changes in response to the pandemic that we have decided to make permanent, and which will have the continued effect of reducing exposure. These include: 1) We will not be operating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July race, 2) We have reduced the size of the K-12 programs to focus on quality and less on quantity, 3) We continue to provide porta-potties by the Visitors Center, not providing public access to the outhouses by Barclay.
14. If necessary, we will respond quickly, as we did last summer, to address increasing risks of transmission or the emergence of a problematic variant. However, we will be slow to otherwise modify our general approach or policies.

We believe it is important that people be able to understand what kind of environment they can expect before arriving, both in terms of avoiding covid-19 transmission, but also in terms of maintaining personal interactions, especially given mental health challenges associated with isolation.

If you have questions or feedback about this policy, please contact Brett Biebuyck, Director of Administration, [brett@rmbll.org](mailto:brett@rmbll.org) or Kelly Sudderth, Chief Operating Officer [kelly@rmbll.org](mailto:kelly@rmbll.org).

We can't wait to see you!

Ian Billick (Executive Director), Kelly Sudderth (Chief Operating Officer), Brett Biebuyck (Director of Operations)