

Best Practices Guide for Charter Fishing and COVID-19

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COVID-19 in Illinois and Indiana

Illinois and Indiana have implemented a phased approach to reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic. Depending on the state, county, or city, each phase has different restrictions and guidelines, including those specific to charter fishing (e.g. capacity limits, personal protective equipment, etc.). Regularly review state and federal public health resources to stay up-to-date on the phased reopening and relevant COVID-19 guidelines.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Illinois Department of Public Health: <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19>

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity: <https://dceocovid19resources.com/restore-illinois/>

Indiana State Department of Health: <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/>

Best Practices at a Glance...

For Charter Operators

Before a fishing trip

- ① Develop a preparedness plan
- ② Offer COVID-19 training to staff
- ③ Conduct customer transactions remotely
- ④ Conduct COVID-19 screening
- ⑤ Keep 6 feet apart while loading/unloading
- ⑥ Provide signage for staff and customers

During a fishing trip

- ① Reduce the number of customers on each trip
- ② Use facial coverings and hand sanitizer
- ③ Keep 6 feet apart in areas like cabins and restrooms
- ④ Sanitize fishing equipment between each use

After a fishing trip

- ① Use PPE and keep 6 feet apart while cleaning fish
- ② Sanitize common areas and fishing equipment
- ③ Keep staff and customer records for contact tracing

For Customers

Before a fishing trip

- ① Be well informed of health guidelines
- ② Consider using a local charter operator
- ③ If you are sick or most at risk, stay home

During a fishing trip

- ① Bring and use PPE such as face coverings and hand sanitizer
- ② Bring your own cooler for food, drinks, and fish

After a fishing trip

- ① Contact health authorities and charter operator if you develop COVID-19 symptoms

Best Practices for Charter Fishing

Charter fishing is an important industry to Illinois and Indiana. However, charter fishing involves a number of activities that may introduce risk of COVID-19 transmission. The purpose of this factsheet is to suggest best practices that can reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This guide provides best practices that can reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These best practices promote specific safety procedures for charter fishing operations to protect each captain, crew member, and customer, based on guidelines from the Illinois and Indiana State Departments of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Best Practices for Charter Operators

There are a number of measures that charter operators can take to build a safe environment for fishing and help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Best practices should be implemented before, during, and after a fishing trip.

Before a fishing trip

1. **Preparedness plan:** Develop a preparedness plan to manage exposure to COVID-19. This plan may include specific protocols for staff and customers, such as wearing face masks or other personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizing boats and equipment, training staff, and posting signage on the boat.
2. **Staff training:** Provide COVID-19 prevention training (e.g. PPE, hand washing, disinfecting) to captains and crew.
3. **Customer transactions:** Conduct customer transactions, such as payment and fishing licenses, remotely to minimize person-to-person contact.
4. **COVID-19 screening:** Screen staff and customers for COVID-19 symptoms. People experiencing symptoms, or those that have been in close contact with someone experiencing symptoms, should be encouraged to stay at home. A list of COVID-19 symptoms can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>.
5. **Social distancing:** Encourage staff and customers to travel to the departure location in separate vehicles and maintain at least 6 feet separation while waiting at the marina/harbor.
6. **Signage:** Post signage on the boat that promotes the use of PPE, sanitization, and social distancing guidelines.

During a fishing trip

1. **Boat capacity:** Reduce the number of staff and customers on each fishing trip. Note that some states and cities have specific capacity limits as part of their phased reopening plan.



2. **Use of PPE:** Encourage staff and customers to use PPE, including facial coverings, gloves, and/or goggles.
3. **Social distancing:** Where possible, facilitate social distancing on the boat, including separating those from different households by at least 6 feet. This is particularly important for common areas such as cabins and restrooms.
4. **Sanitization:** Provide hand sanitizer and cleaning products to facilitate the sanitization of the boat. Shared fishing equipment (e.g. rods, nets) should be sanitized between each use. Common touch-points (e.g. restrooms) should also be regularly sanitized (e.g. once per hour).

After a fishing trip

1. **Fish Cleaning:** Maintain 6 feet between people at fish cleaning stations. Use PPE when cleaning and bagging fish. Clean fish for each customer or customer group (i.e. household) in a batch before moving to the next group of fish. Sanitize fillet knives, cutting boards, and other fish cleaning equipment between each batch of fish.
2. **Sanitization:** Use appropriate solutions (e.g. bleach, >60% alcohol) to sanitize common surfaces (e.g. chairs, restrooms, cabins), fishing equipment (e.g. rods, nets), and safety equipment (e.g. life jackets) after each fishing trip. Consider posting information on protocols and the date/time of last sanitization.
3. **Contact tracing:** Keep accurate records of staff and customers that have been on the boat, including names and contact information, to facilitate contact tracing if needed.

Best Practices for Customers

There are a number of measures that charter fishing customers can take to minimize their exposure to COVID-19 and potential transmission to other customers, captains and crew. Charter operators are encouraged to pass this information on to potential customers.

Before a fishing trip

1. **Be well informed:** Access the most up-to-date COVID-19 guidelines by visiting the websites for the state and federal public health websites. Contact potential charter boat operators to ask about their COVID-19 preparedness plan.
2. **Shop local:** Consider using a local charter operator for your fishing trip to reduce unnecessary travel.
3. **If you are sick, stay at home:** If you or someone in your household is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, stay at home and postpone your fishing trip until you have recovered. Customers who are most vulnerable to COVID-19 (e.g. over 65 years old and/or with pre-existing health conditions) should also consider postponing their trip.

During a fishing trip

1. **Bring and use PPE:** Bring your own facial coverings, gloves, goggles, and hand sanitizer to use while on the fishing trip.
2. **Be self-sufficient:** To minimize person-to-person contact, consider bringing your own cooler for food, drinks, and any fish caught.

After a fishing trip

1. **Contact tracing:** If you develop COVID-19 symptoms after the fishing trip, contact your local health authorities and the charter operator to facilitate contact tracing if needed.



Acknowledgements

Information in this best practices guide was developed in coordination with fisheries agencies and outreach specialists in the Great Lakes region. Special thanks go to the Illinois and Indiana Departments of Natural Resources and representatives of the North Point Charter Boat Association and the Chicago Sportfishing Association. Development of the guide was made possible through rapid-response funding provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Thanks to Joel Davenport and Hope Charters for design and editing assistance.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this guide is developed based on reliable federal and state public health resources at the time of publication. The COVID-19 pandemic and relevant guidelines are constantly changing; therefore, you should aim to obtain the most up-to-date information. The best practices are provided to reduce the risks of spreading infectious viruses but cannot completely eliminate those risks. Due to the nature of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19, neither Purdue, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, nor the author can guarantee any results based on the information that is provided in this guide.

