

Forest School Safety FAQ

Where is Forest School?

Forest School takes place at the Gordon Carter Environmental Education Site, on the southeast end of Lake Whatcom. The Environmental Education Site is owned by Bellingham Public Schools and is maintained by facilities staff.

What types of conditions can my child expect during Forest School?

The Environmental Education Site is a 120-acre property and is largely wooded with two small creeks running through the property. Students will stay on the trail system and will always be with a trail group, instructor and/or adult chaperone.

Does Forest School staff have medical training?

The Forest School Program Coordinator has a current Wilderness First Responder certification. Instructors are not required to have first aid certifications but many tend to have at least CPR and basic First Aid.

Where is the closest Emergency Medical Response?

The closest EMS service is South Lake Whatcom Fire District 18. District 18 will be informed of program operating days, approximate numbers of participants and staff medical training. **EMS response time is approximately 10-12 minutes.**

What kinds of hazards might my child encounter at Forest School?

Forest School is a 4 hour field trip that takes place entirely at the BPS Gordon Carter Environmental Education Site. North Cascades Institute requires all participants to sign the general Participant Information Release Form--please note this form is used for ALL Institute programs and is not specific to Forest School.

- To minimize the potential for injuries, students will not climb trees or rocks above the height of their knees, carry walking sticks, or run unless they are on the open playing field.
- Schools will have one personal vehicle available as secondary transport for participants if there is an urgent need to remove a student from the site.
- The Environmental Education Site is a natural environment. Stinging nettles, thorny plants and insects are potential dangers.
- Students with a history of anaphylaxis are required to bring their own Epi-pen. The Program Coordinator carries and is certified to administer epinephrine.
- Students are required to wear long pants and close toed shoes.

Ticks in Washington State

Although there are very few cases each year in Washington compared to the rest of the country, some ticks do carry disease. These include Lyme disease, tick-borne relapsing fever, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tick paralysis, Tularemia, and Babesiosis.

According to the Washington Department of Health, each year, 7-23 cases of Lyme disease among Washington residents are reported. Most of these people acquired the disease following tick bites that occurred in the northeast and upper mid-west states, where Lyme disease occurs more commonly. **However, there are usually a few cases (0-3) in Washington annually that result from tick bites in our state.** Cases for other tick-borne diseases are equally rare. For more information about tick-borne diseases in Washington State, visit: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Pests/Ticks>

What do I do if I find an embedded tick?

The most important thing is not to panic! Ticks are fairly easy to remove, and we want to do so immediately. The best way is to grasp the tick near the skin with tweezers and pull straight out gently and consistently. Do not twist, squeeze, or yank the tick because this can increase your chances of detaching the mouthparts. Save the tick and record the time and location so that it can be checked for disease by a doctor. A normal reaction to a bite is a small red bump around the bite, and does not mean that Lyme disease has been transmitted.

What are the warning signs for Lyme Disease?

Warning signs may appear 3 – 30 days following the bite. They include flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, headache), a red rash that becomes warm and may be unrelated to the bite site, fatigue, muscle or joint stiffness, jaw discomfort, and/or red eyes. Ticks in the nymph stage are smaller, paler, and hard to find so keep an eye out for the following symptoms when hiking in tick country.

Some patients may be unaware of a tick bite and not experience a rash. Therefore, if you experience any of these warning signs, contact your healthcare provider immediately. Without treatment, Lyme disease can lead to lifelong arthritic problems and other health challenges.

How do I prevent myself from getting tick bites?

Perform tick checks at the end of each Forest School day when you are getting ready for bed. Remember to check in the hard-to-see areas like your scalp, armpits, groin area, and bra line. Wear light colored clothing to spot ticks easier. Bug repellent is effective against ticks, though not guaranteed. Wearing long clothing and tucking your pants into your socks can also prevent ticks from reaching their desired habitat.

Under what conditions will the Forest School field trip be cancelled?

Forest School may be cancelled due to the following circumstances:

- Bellingham Public School closure
- Obstacles (downed trees) on the driveway which limits entry by the buses
- High winds

- Snow accumulation that closes BPS.
- Program Coordinator will monitor the weather and act on a case by case basis.
- The Program Coordinator will consult with teachers and administrators if unforeseen circumstances warrant cancellation.
- If the program needs to be cancelled mid-day, the bus driver will return to the Site and transport students back to school.