

For more information about this topic, call the Risk Management Division:

- 1-801-240-4049
 - 1-800-453-3860, ext. 2-4049 (toll free in the United States and Canada)
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This fact sheet provides information to help stake presidencies and bishoprics safely organize and conduct handcart trek activities for stake and ward members.

Introduction

Pioneer handcart treks for youth are a local option. Stake presidents and bishops decide whether to hold handcart treks in their area. The following guidelines are provided for stakes and wards that choose to hold a trek activity.

Handcart treks require significant planning and supervision to achieve meaningful purposes with minimal risks. Stake presidents and bishops should share these guidelines with all leaders who will be involved in the trek.

Leadership

Stake presidencies and bishoprics are responsible for and approve all trek plans. They may delegate specific responsibilities for planning the trek activity to qualified leaders who work under their direction.

Planning

Handcart treks require extensive preparation and may take up to a year of planning. All plans should follow Church policies as outlined in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), chapter 13 (“Activities”) and chapter 21 (“Selected Church Policies and Guidelines”).

For a trek activity to be successful, leaders must be well trained and prepared. If possible, a training trek for leaders is recommended. Leaders should ensure that parents are informed about trek activities.

As an alternative to holding handcart treks at Mormon Trail sites, leaders are encouraged to consider convenient sites on public or private land. When such sites are used, leaders should obtain the necessary approvals and ensure that the rights and property of others are respected.

In addition, leaders should give careful attention to the following:

1. **Spiritual development.** Church activities should strengthen testimonies and foster personal growth. Leaders should ensure that the trek provides participants with opportunities to apply gospel principles and feel support in living them.
2. **Physical preparation.** Handcart treks require physical stamina; thus, each participant should be encouraged to eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and get sufficient rest before the trek. Doing these things will enhance the experience for each participant.
3. **Physical and mental challenges.** Some adults and youth who participate in the trek may have physical or mental challenges, such as diabetes, blindness, advanced pregnancy, Down syndrome, obesity, or depression. Leaders should make preparations to accommodate any special needs for food, medication, equipment, supervision, or safety for these individuals.

4. **Age recommendations.** Youth under age 14 usually do not participate in trek activities (see the guidelines for youth conferences in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* [2010], 13.6.14).
5. **Adult leadership.** For strenuous youth activities such as handcart treks, there should usually be at least one adult for every ten youth.
6. **Adequate food and water.** Dehydration can lead to heat exhaustion, heatstroke, and death. Each handcart should carry adequate water for the participants. Leaders should make sure that youth take frequent breaks to drink water and that nutritious food is provided throughout the trek. Additional information on heat-related risks and prevention measures can be found in the Heat Illness Prevention Fact Sheet. *Food should be stored, prepared, and served* at the appropriate temperatures to prevent foodborne illness. Chickens, turkeys, or other live animals should not be killed during treks.
7. **Adequate clothing and shelter.** Participants should avoid wearing wet clothing, which can cause body temperature to drop rapidly and can result in hypothermia. To prevent sunburn, participants should wear sunscreen, long sleeves, wide-brimmed hats or bonnets, and sunglasses. To prevent blisters, participants should wear appropriate shoes that fit and are broken in and socks that wick away moisture. They should bring extra clothing and camping gear that are appropriate for cold nights, wind, and rain.
8. **Appropriate sanitary facilities.** For groups larger than 15 people, trailer-mounted portable toilets should be provided and maintained in a sanitary condition. For small groups, human waste may be buried in biodegradable bags or containers or in accordance with local best practices. Camps should be set up at least 100 feet from any stream or open water. Wastewater should be disposed of at least 200 feet from water sources. Trek groups should carry out all trash and leave camping areas cleaner than they found them.
9. **Local camping and fire regulations.** Leaders should know in advance any local camping and fire regulations for the areas where they will stay. They should also know how to contact law enforcement and emergency services.
10. **Travel costs and distance.** Leaders should follow the guidelines for activities and travel as outlined in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 13.2.8 and 13.6.24.

Safety

Leaders should take all necessary precautions to ensure that participants are safe throughout the trek activity. Leaders should focus on preventing illness or injury *and on being prepared to provide treatment if necessary*. Safety precautions should include the following:

1. All youth participating in the trek activity should complete a Parental or Guardian Permission and Medical Release form (33810). All participating adults should provide necessary information about medical conditions. Leaders should be aware of any participants who have special needs.
2. Licensed health care professionals should be present and available for the entire trek. At least one physician or other skilled health care professional should participate in each trek activity. In addition, one nurse or emergency medical technician (EMT) is recommended for every 50 to 100 participants.

3. Sufficient first-aid supplies should be available to treat dehydration, heatstroke, sunburn, blisters, exhaustion, insect or snake bites, and severe allergies. *Supplies for intravenous rehydration should also be available.* All adult leaders should be trained to monitor the hydration and general well-being of participants.
4. Leaders should prepare a written emergency action plan in case of severe weather, lost youth, accidents, or other possible emergencies.
5. Leaders should have a reliable and tested emergency communication system, such as a two-way radio or cellular phone.
6. Participants should have continual access to personal vehicles that could be used in case of an emergency, such as sport utility vehicles with four-wheel drive and air conditioning.
7. Leaders should be aware of the hazards associated with handcarts and ensure that all handcarts are well constructed and able to safely carry trek supplies.

Resources

Information on constructing or renting pioneer handcarts is available at www.handcarttreks.com. This website also has information about handcart treks held on Church-owned properties. Other helpful resources include the *Young Women Camp Manual* (34573) and the Boy Scouts of America's *Guide to Safe Scouting*.