



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**THE LIVING DESERT ZOO AND GARDENS SET TO REOPEN AS AN OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITY ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17**

**PALM DESERT/INDIAN WELLS** – (December 16, 2020) – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens will reopen daytime operations as an outdoor recreational facility on Thursday, December 17. Under the State of California’s December 6<sup>th</sup> regional stay-at-home order, outdoor recreational facilities are permitted to operate with additional safety precautions. Set on more than 1,200 total acres, The Living Desert features miles of hiking trails and paved garden pathways, allowing guests the opportunity to pursue physically distanced, personal health and wellness through outdoor exercise.

To adhere to the State of California’s outdoor recreational facility operating requirements, The Living Desert will close all food and beverage outlets, areas of gathering, indoor exhibits, giraffe feeding, and the carousel. Advanced reservations are required for all admissions including members and guests. In addition, face coverings continue to be required for all guests over 3 years of age.

“The Living Desert is known for a variety of attributes including being a beautiful place to walk and hike,” said Allen Monroe, President/CEO of The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens. “We are grateful that we can continue to provide our community the opportunity to safely connect with nature during these challenging times.”

The original mandate from the State of California included zoos, however, The Living Desert does not fit the traditional zoo definition with its vast hiking trails and more than 50 botanical gardens. The cities of Palm Desert, Indian Wells, and Rancho Mirage, along with the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) wrote formal letters to Riverside County stating that The Living Desert officially meets the criteria and intent of an outdoor recreation facility. After legal review, the City of Palm Desert issued a determination that The Living Desert was officially classified as an outdoor recreation facility. Therefore, The Living Desert has outlined a revised COVID-19 reopening strategy with the following modifications:

Health and Safety Precautions: Advanced reservations required, limited guest capacity, required face coverings for all guests 3 years and older, easy access to numerous handwashing/sanitizing stations, in addition to the Park’s current COVID-19 safe operating procedures.

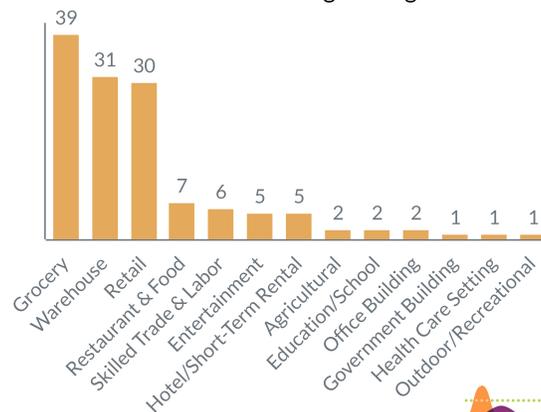
What will be Open: Paved walking paths and unpaved hiking trails; The Appel Gift Shop will be open with 20% capacity.

What will be Temporarily Closed: All food and beverage outlets, indoor exhibit spaces, outdoor play spaces, giraffe feeding, wildlife and reptile shows, keeper chats, carousel, private tours, and other points of gathering. WildLights remains canceled.

“The health, safety and wellbeing of our staff, volunteers, animals, and guests continues to be our highest priority, and we remain diligent in our efforts to help slow the spread of COVID-19. The enforcement of mask-wearing and physical distancing throughout the Park will be a high priority for our team,” continued Monroe. “As outlined by the Riverside County Department of Health and State of California, outdoor recreation continues to be a low-risk activity, and we look forward to welcoming guests back to the Park.”

## Large Outbreaks

132 Outbreaks with 5 or more associated cases were reported. Large outbreaks were seen in the following settings:



Source: Public Health Contact Tracing Platform  
Accessed 12/02/20, Investigated July - November



“Although we were disappointed to cancel our beloved WildLights, those with existing tickets can choose to receive a refund or use their WildLights tickets for a general daytime visit anytime in the next year,” said Mark Miller, Director of Park Services and Guest Relations. “Furthermore, we are currently evaluating the potential of rescheduling WildLights to a later date, but no decision has been made at this time.”

For more information, visit [LivingDesert.org/Health](http://LivingDesert.org/Health).

The Living Desert will be open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with last admission at 4 p.m. Advanced reservations are required and tickets can be purchased online at [livingdesert.org](http://livingdesert.org).

### **About The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens:**

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens is a nonprofit, accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, ensuring the highest standards of all aspects of animal care, education, conservation, public service, and operations. The Zoo is active in conservation research, habitat protection, breeding programs and education initiatives around the world, as well as in its own community. The Zoo has been a top destination in the Palm Springs area for 50 years. The Living Desert is located at 47900 Portola Ave, Palm Desert, CA 92260. For more information: (760) 346-5694 or visit [livingdesert.org](http://livingdesert.org).

