

WEEKEND



Social distancing doesn't mean
man's best friend can't leave
the house 8

Fetching tips for dog outings

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INDOOR ACTIVITIES

Missing your game nights? Jackbox has a silly solution for that. **5**

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Fresh air can do wonders for Fido. . . and you

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

Life is topsy-turvy with coronavirus restrictions, even for our dogs. Hamilton the beagle and I are missing our old life together: road trips, volunteer visits, activities with friends. But our slow, scent-filled strolls in local parks have become a welcome stand-in. ¶ Under stay-at-home orders, walking our dogs is, for many, a refreshing distraction. When it comes with a change of scenery, it's an indulgence for those on either end of the leash. ¶ Here are 10 tips for keeping your dog and you safe and healthy during the pandemic and beyond. (It goes without saying: Always pick up after your pup. If you can't safely toss it in a public trash can, discard it at home.)

Stay close to home. Avoid unnecessary travel by finding a park or trail near your home. Check park websites and social media for updates, and respect closures: gates, cones, barricades or signs. Although on some days you may need to take a short drive to the park with your dog, keep in mind Fairfax County's pithy covid-19 messaging: If you need a car, the trail is too far.

Adjust your routine. Some of Hammy's favorite spots — such as the U.S. National Arboretum, Roosevelt Island and East Potomac Park — are either closed or completely blocked to cars. Other popular spots, including the Mall,

Mount Vernon Trail, Meridian Hill Park, Montrose Park, Lincoln Park and the Alexandria Waterfront, are open but often too congested for social distancing. If a park looks too crowded, or there's no legal parking, plan to visit another time.

Treat Fido like a family member. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "There is no evidence that animals play a significant role in spreading the virus that causes covid-19." While a small number of pets have been reported to be infected with the virus, mostly after contact with people, the risk



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Where to go

This month, Hammy sniffed out seven area parks appropriate for social distancing. During our weekday visits, these paths and trails were mostly empty. If you can, visit during off-hours.

Montgomery and Prince George's County parks are still open for parking and trail use. All District parks, including outdoor spaces and dog parks, are closed. At Northern Virginia parks, trails and paths are open, but many parking lots are closed. National

parks vary by location; check the park service website for updates.

Keep in mind: All park facilities in the DMV, including bathrooms, water fountains and picnic areas, are closed. Avoid touching shared surfaces and congregating in groups and wash your hands when you get home. Using a face covering does not replace social distancing.

Peirce Mill
2401 Tilden St. NW

From Rock Creek Park's Peirce Mill, you and your pup can walk on the paved path or head to the

trails — which promise lighter paw traffic and more interesting terrain. Valley Trail and Western Ridge Trail run north-south in Rock Creek Park, and connector trails join them at various points to create loops. If Peirce Mill parking lot is full, try the nearby Tregaron Conservancy, which connects to Rock Creek Park by the Klingle Valley Trail.

Anacostia Park
Good Hope Road and Anacostia Drive SE

Across the Anacostia River from Navy Yard Riverwalk and

Yards Park (which is officially closed) via the 11th Street Bridge, Anacostia Park and its Riverwalk Trail offer wide open spaces for even the most socially distant humans and dogs. Walk on the paved path along Anacostia Drive, on the street itself (now closed to vehicles between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.) or on the fields (closed to athletics). The trail continues north and connects with Kingman and Heritage Islands, which are open. Parking at Anacostia Park is limited: If you're driving, park in the lots off Good Hope or Nicholson streets SE.

Wheaton Regional Park
2000 Shorefield Rd., Wheaton

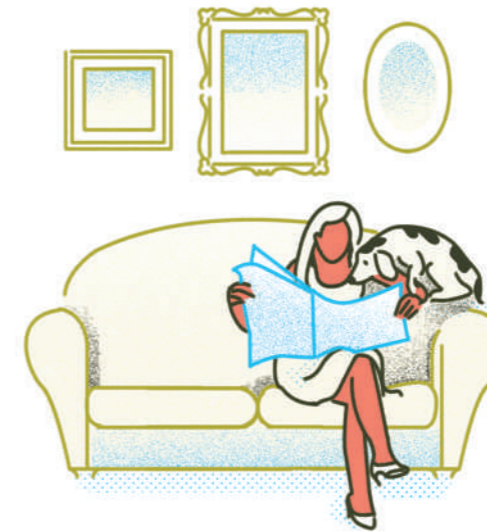
Just outside the Beltway, this park has a four-mile network of winding, hard-surface paths as well as five miles of natural-surface trails. To accommodate walkers during this time, Montgomery County has also closed portions of Little Falls Parkway, Beach Drive and Sligo Creek Parkway to vehicles between Friday at 9 a.m. and Sunday at 6 p.m.

Walker Mill Regional Park
8001 Walker Mill Rd., Capitol Heights

Located a few miles east of the District, just inside the Beltway, this 500-acre park has a scenic and hilly paved walking path and plenty of shoulder for your dog and you to wait for passing pedestrians.

Henson Creek Trail
1770 Tucker Rd., Fort Washington

Dogs asking for longer walks have options at Henson Creek Trail, which stretches 5.7 miles in Prince George's County. From the parking lot at Tucker Road Athletic Complex, take the wide paved trail along the stream, over



of animals spreading covid-19 to people is considered low. Until more is known about the virus, however, the CDC recommends treating pets as you would any other family member: Don't let them interact with people or animals outside the household or family members who are sick.

Keep your distance. On paths and trails, stay at least six feet from other people and dogs. When walkers or runners approach, step off the path and allow them to pass. Even better, find a field where you and your dog won't have to pass anyone. Jackie Moyano, a trainer and founding member of Behavior United in Silver Spring, discourages on-leash meetings — now or ever. "It's an unnatural way for dogs to greet each other, and the tension on the leash can contribute to bad manners." In her training, Moyano has dogs look to their humans for a treat when they see a dog they don't know. If a stranger asks about saying hello to your dog, this is an easy time to practice saying, "Not right now, thanks for asking," without the stigma of being unfriendly. "Not all dogs love other people or other dogs," Moyano says, "Even after we go back to not social distancing, we should be in the mind-set of giving dog space if they want it."

Read your dog. Pay attention to cues to know how your dog is feeling, especially when encountering another dog. Yawning, lip-licking, paw-raising and tail-tucking can all be signs of anxiety. People tend to assume that a wagging tail means a happy pup, but it simply means arousal. A fast, upright wag means canine concern, Moyano says. The friendly tail wag is lower, sometimes a full-body wag starting at the shoulder. Check out the iSpeakDog website for more tips on interpreting "Doggish" to English.

Leash up. It's always important to follow leash laws — for the protection of your dog, other dogs and humans — but it's particularly important now. The use of retractable leashes is controversial. Alexandra Dilley, director of behavior and training at the Humane Rescue Alliance (HRA), advises against the leashes because many people mishandle them. It takes coordination and practice to shorten the leash if you need to quickly control your dog. Dilley warns that retractable leashes can get entangled with other dog leashes, and if you grab the leash as a dog's running it out, you may cut or burn your hand. When trainers do recommend retractable leashes, it's only for remote areas or fields, where 20-foot traditional leashes are handy, too.

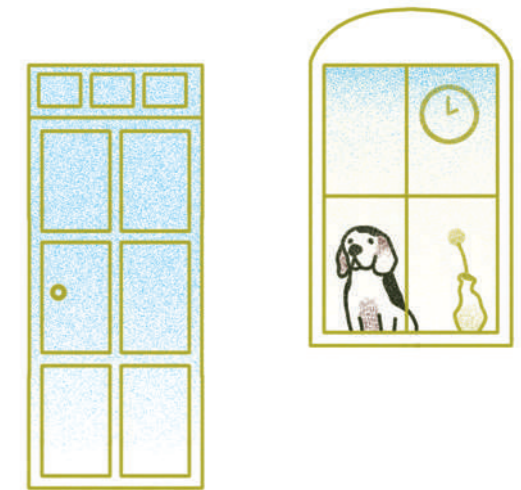
Train while you walk. Take this quieter time to work with your dog on behavior. Amy Pike, a behaviorist and owner of Animal Behavior Wellness Center in Northern Virginia, said if your dog gets triggered (by a person, dog, skateboard, loud truck, etc.), shorten the leash, try to put yourself between the dog and the trigger, and pass as quickly as possible. "I don't like seeing a person make the dog sit and forcing them to remain in an uncomfortable situation," she says. "If you have to pick up the pace while distracting the dog with treats, I think that's the better option."

Don't leave home without treats. In an environment with lots of distractions, it's important to keep your dog's attention. The best way to do that, at least for Hammy, is with treats. When we step aside on a trail to let a dog pass, I reward him for sitting and waiting. I also use treats (I like Charlee Bear brand because they're low-calorie and low-mess) to reinforce good behavior. To engage dogs who aren't as food-driven as Hammy, bust out the higher-value treats.

Go for a short sniff. You may be counting your steps, but your dog doesn't need to follow suit. Sniffing and other mentally enriching exercises (such as find-

ing hidden treats around the house or working to get kibble out of a toy) are at least as important as physical exercise, Moyano says. Replace that four-mile walk with a leisurely, one-mile sniff. Introducing your dog to new places — where different critters live and varied smells await — is like picking up a new book, Moyano says. "Eighty percent of the walks should be sniffing. You'll be surprised how tired that makes them."

Leave your dog home daily. Dogs aren't much for planning, but their human companions can do something now to prevent separation anxiety in the future. Pike recommends leaving your dog home alone several times a day. "Go out and have your own experience to remind them we do have lives away from them, and we'll be going back to work and school," she says. If you normally take your dog for two or three walks a day, don't start doing it more often, just because you have more time. Rather, get in your own power walk. Also important: Keep your routine. If your dog typically walks and eats before sunrise — looking at you, Hammy — stick to the schedule so the post-pandemic change won't be traumatic. HRA recently offered a webinar with tips on how to teach your dog to "live well when alone."



blooms.

Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts
1551 Trap Rd., Vienna

With performing stages dark, nature takes the limelight at this typically popular venue. Beyond the paved paths are two miles of hiking trails, rocky and interesting loops that will keep your dogs on their toes. The trails pass through 65 bird-filled acres of forest and cross over a small gurgling creek.

goingoutguide@washpost.com