

**2024 School Program Information Packet**

We’re excited that you have chosen to bring your group to Merck Forest to participate in a program with us!  We look forward to spending time with you in this amazing landscape, whether you’ve been coming to Merck Forest for years or are a first-time visitor.  Please read carefully through this packet in order to make the most of your trip and help each member of your group to be prepared for a safe and enjoyable visit.

While we are mindful of age and physical limitations of groups, participants should expect to walk a minimum of 1.5 miles, in all types of weather.  Please share the following information with all students and chaperones so they are prepared for their time at Merck Forest.

**Coming Prepared to be in the Backcountry**

* Merck Forest is a backcountry setting!  In the event of any emergency situation,  we are at least an hour away from definitive care and emergency services. Preparedness in the backcountry is essential.  The majority of activities at Merck Forest take place outside, and our higher elevation and wind chill factor can often mean temperatures that are cooler than in the valleys (as much as 15° colder than lower elevations). **Dressing appropriately for the conditions is a matter of safety, not just comfort!**
* **As the group leader and contact, it is your responsibility to ensure that all students are properly attired for the program prior to departure from the school.**
* Layers are the best way to prepare for variable weather conditions. Please refer to the attached checklist, and encourage your group members to pack anything from this list that they are not actively wearing.
* Please refer to the attached “Dressing for Cold Weather” graphic from NOAA as a guideline. You can check out our weather by going to WeatherUnderground for West Rupert, VT.
* In the case of inclement weather, your program may have to be modified. If the upcoming weather forecast is questionable, we will be in contact to discuss options for your trip.

**Chaperones and Authorized Personnel**

* We love full engagement from adults, teachers and chaperones in our programs. While Merck Forest staff are facilitating and leading the program, teachers and accompanying adults are responsible for the whereabouts and behavior of their students at all times. Please support Merck Forest program leaders in safely guiding students through the property and activities.

* **Our maximum group size for programs is 30 students, with a minimum of 1 chaperone per 10 students but no more than 2 chaperones per 10 students** (with the exception of para educators for individual students). If you have a class or students with specific needs or adjustments, we’re happy to discuss possible adaptations or accommodations with you.
* If a student has a health issue or allergy that may be of concern, please be prepared to handle these situations according to your school’s protocol.  If your group is going to be split up during your time at Merck, please ensure chaperones are briefed on any such concerns for the students in their group. Please be sure any students requiring prophylactic medications – e.g. asthma, seizure, allergy medications – have them available.  We are in a backcountry setting, and medical help can be an hour or more away.

**Lunch at Merck Forest**

* There are no trash facilities at Merck Forest; we are a carry-in, carry-out facility.  If your group will be having lunch at Merck Forest, please note that your group must carry out their own garbage.
* Please bring a garbage bag to carry your trash out.  Garbage cans are not provided.
* Groups usually elect to have lunch at or near the Sap House, a 1/4 mile walk from the Visitor Center.  Please keep this in mind as you will need to carry your lunches to the Sap House.
* If students are bringing school lunches packed in paper bags, please provide them with a waterproof bag to put lunches in if you will be out in the field at lunchtime.  Plastic grocery bags work great for this.
* Outhouse facilities are available for school groups at the Visitor Center and on the farm. We are able to offer **limited** use of indoor bathroom facilities, due to our septic limitations.

**Say “Cheese!”**

* Merck Forest and Farmland Center may be taking photographs of students during the program for use in publication materials and communications.  Unless told otherwise, Merck Forest staff will assume permission is granted by parents/guardians to do so.

**Rules and expectations**

Please help us to enforce these policies during your time at Merck Forest:

* Students are asked not to approach or interact with dogs brought onto the property by other visitors. We don’t know if these dogs are friendly or safe, especially with a large group of people.
* Assume all fences are electrified, and do not touch.
* Students are not to go into fields, pens, or enclosures with farm animals unless invited to by MFFC staff.

**Arriving at Merck Forest**

* When your school bus or vehicles arrive, please park in the parking lot and walk up through the Welcome Kiosk towards the Visitor Center. We will congregate and begin the program at the Stump Circle to the right of the path after the kiosk.
* Buses that are remaining on property may park on the west end of the parking lot near the dumpsters.
* Refer to the attached map for parking and meeting locations.