

MerleFest 2021

Latest update as of September 14...Vaccination/Negative Covid 19 Test Plan required for Entry!

Festival organizers for MerleFest have announced updated safety protocols for this year's event which takes place Sept. 16-19 in Wilkesboro, NC. MerleFest prides itself on being a safe and family friendly environment. In the interest of safety for all participants—and at the recommendation of high-ranking public health officials and participating artists—all attendees to this year's festival must provide either proof of full vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of entering the event (**children under the age of 1 year are exempt**).

MerleFest organizers are working daily with state and local health officials, in accordance with CDC guidelines, and appreciate in advance the patience and support of all participants. Below are the latest protocols. All protocols are subject to change and updates will be made as necessary or directed.

Festival Safety Protocols:

- **Vaccination/Negative Covid 19 Test presentation for Festival Entry**

- + Festival entry procedures- All attendees and participants will be required to show one of the following 2 options along with festival admission passes to enter the festival:

1. **Proof of Full vaccination**- You can present your vaccination card or a paper photocopy or cell phone photo of your card as proof of your vaccination when you arrive at the festival. Photos/photocopies must show the full card and be legible. You also need to show a photo ID for identification.

-OR-

2. If you have not been vaccinated or do not have a vaccination card, you must show a printed or digital **copy of a negative Covid 19 test performed on you within 72 hours of the time of entry**. You'll also need to show a photo ID for identification.

- + Once you have shown a copy of your vaccination card or a copy of your negative Covid 19 test result, you will be issued a **“Well wristband”** identifying that you have met the

safety criteria for entry into the festival. Please do not remove this wristband until the festival is over as this will be good for the entire time you are at the festival. If you lose or remove your well wristband then you will have to go through the process outlined again to receive another well wristband.

- + Well wristbands are non-transferrable and do not replace the need to purchase a ticket to attend MerleFest. Everyone entering must have a festival ticket/wristband and a well wristband on their arm.

- + **At the advice of health officials, a Negative Covid Test within 72 hours of entry will be required for children of all ages above 1 year old (children less than 1 year are exempt).**

- + Home administered rapid tests are not accepted. All tests should be administered by a licensed medical provider such as a public health department, pharmacy, physician or

Commercial lab.

+ There will be testing available on site, however, we strongly recommend getting a rapid test prior to arriving to avoid waiting in long lines. If you choose to come on

campus for testing, you can pre-register your information to save time. Please go to the OPTUM registration link <https://lhi.care/covidtesting> to pre-register. This will save you time

in getting processed.

+ If you have difficulty in finding a testing site you can refer to the following website for suggested locations to get a test.

NC find my site link: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/about-covid-19/testing/find-my-testing-place> . This is a state sponsored tool to advise the public where testing is available.

+ We do not recommend anyone going to a hospital emergency room for a covid test. Our hospitals are full and are not set up to give covid tests to attend a festival.

- **Masks-** Everyone going inside a building at MerleFest will be required to wear a mask while in that building. This includes the Walker Center Stage, Austin Stage and other campus indoor facilities, including portable bathroom trailers, and the backstage area of the Watson Stage. Masks will also be required for anyone riding a festival shuttle bus or van. We strongly encourage folks to wear a mask in areas of a high concentration of people even if you are vaccinated. We also strongly encourage anyone that has not been vaccinated to wear a mask at all times.
- **Hand washing/sanitizing-** over 100 hand wash and sanitizing stations are being added throughout festival grounds. Colorful signage will be used to identify these areas and they will also be listed on the official MerleFest site map.
- **Distancing-** We ask all participants to be considerate of your neighbor and to provide plenty of space while enjoying the festival.
- **Health attestation-** All volunteers/festival staff/food workers/bus drivers will be required to complete a health attestation prior to beginning their shift each day. Anyone who is experiencing Covid 19 symptoms or has been recently exposed to someone with Covid 19 will not be allowed to participate.
- **Continuous Cleaning-** WCC Custodial staff and festival cleaning teams will be cleaning, sanitizing high touch areas, and disposing of trash throughout the festival.
- **Safety support-** Representatives from Wake Forest Baptist Health, Wilkes EMS, Wilkesboro Fire Department, and local law enforcement will be on site throughout the festival to handle any health and safety needs.

- **Health Department support-** Representatives from the Wilkes County Health Department will be on site during the festival to monitor health practices in all areas of the festival. In addition, the health department will offer free vaccinations to all volunteers and staff prior to the festival and all festival attendees during the festival.

Festival Enhancements and Changes for 2021 (subject to change):

- **Festival Hours-** For 2021 we will begin/open the following all at the same time to keep people moving and to reduce congestion in the box office area:
 - **Buses-** start rolling from parking lots at 1:30pm on Thursday and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, & Sun
 - **Box Office-** will open at 1:30pm on Thursday, and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, and Sun
 - **Cooler Check/Gates-** will open at 1:30pm on Thursday and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, & Sun
 - **Shoppes/Crafts-** will open at 1:30pm on Thursday and 9:30am on Fri, Sat, & Sun
- **New Exit:** a new exit will be added connecting to the greenway behind the apartments. This will be the primary pedestrian exit from the festival throughout the festival.
- **Heritage Crafts-** We will house all craft vendors in tents that will allow all booths to face outside.
- **Indoor Stages:** We will increase air conditioner flow capacity to enhance circulation of fresh air. Masks are required at all times by health officials for all indoor stages and buildings.
- **Mayes Pit Stage-** We will not offer programming in Mayes Pit for 2021 due to the small size of this auditorium and the inability to increase fresh air flow.
- **Backstage Tours:** We will not offer backstage tours in 2021 to reduce the number of people in the backstage area.
- **Side Stage Seating:** We will not offer side stage seating for Patrons in 2021 as a protection for the artists and to reduce crowding backstage.
- **MerleFest Museum:** This area will be open with limited capacity constraints. Masks will be required while visiting the museum.
- **Little Pickers Area:**
 - Due to the dramatic increase in children with covid, masks are highly recommended for all children (children 5 years and under are exempt) and adults entering this area
 - The following will be added to this area: jugglers/magician/balloon art will be scheduled to add entertainment to this area
 - To minimize high touch activities, the following will be deleted from this area for 2021: Scrap Exchange, crafts, large sandbox, DIY bubbles, arcade style games and the Instrument Petting Zoo.
- **Overnight Storage/Lost and Found-** We will not offer overnight storage or Lost and Found this year due to a shortage of staff. Any lost and found item should be taken to the Visitors Center located next to the WCC Garden of the Senses.
- **Acoustic Kids Showcases** have been cancelled for MerleFest 2021.
- **MerleFest Mall:** Inventory for the mall will be limited to items from the artists playing at the 2021 festival, Doc Watson/Merle Watson items, and other select offerings. The reduction will allow more room for people to distance and safely shop. Masks are recommended in this area.
- **MerleFest Apparel-** For the first time, we will offer all MerleFest apparel for sale online August 2-16 to allow fans to purchase and receive their favorite shirts or hats prior to the festival. We will still offer a gift shop on site but this should greatly reduce lines and congestion.

- **School Day at MerleFest:** We will not offer School Day in 2021 to prevent large gatherings of unvaccinated children.
- **Large Food Tent:** We will remove a large number of eating tables from this tent. The big food tent will be used primarily for selling food/beverages & handling lines of people waiting to purchase.
- **Dining Tent:** We will convert the former R&R Tent to a Dining Tent. Tables & chairs will be placed (distanced) in this area for people to take food and sit down to eat. Sanitation teams will clean tables after each use.
- **Shade Tent-** The R & R tent will now be relabeled as the Shade Tent in the Watson field. This tent offers seating, a lactation room, and a baby changing station in this area.
- **Shuttle Buses-** all bus riders will be **required** to wear a mask. Buses will be periodically sanitized. Hand sanitizer will also be provided prior to boarding buses.

We deeply appreciate your patience and support throughout this journey. We have to continually remind ourselves that the issues we are dealing with are short term. If you have specific questions, feel free to contact the MerleFest box office (800) 343-7857 or email us at merlefest@wilkescc.edu. We hope to see you at MerleFest 2021!