How to play Pokémon Go when everyone’s stuck inside



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While most game makers are seeing booming usage statistics in the era of coronavirus-induced social distancing, Niantic is in the opposite position. The company’s games—including *Pokémon Go*, *Harry Potter: Wizards Unite*, and *Ingress*—are all built around the idea of leaving the house and meeting up with people in real-world locations.

Now that those things are impossible or discouraged for large portions of the population, Niantic is adjusting its game design philosophy to “embrace real-world gaming from home,” as it says in a blog update today.

“We have always believed that our games can include elements of indoor play that complement the outdoor, exercise and explore DNA of what we build,” the company writes. “Now is the time for us to prioritize this work, with the key challenge of making playing indoors as exciting and innovative as our outdoor gameplay.”

To that end, Niantic will be improving its existing Adventure Sync connection, which lets your mobile device track steps to earn in-game rewards even while you’re not playing. Niantic says it will update that feature “so it works even better with indoor movement and activities” and so “activities like cleaning your house and running on a treadmill count toward game achievements.”

Pokémon Go players will soon also be able to team up for raids without the need to congregate together in a real-world place. Live events like the (sometimes disastrous) Pokémon Go Fest will also be going virtual, with more details to come soon. And the company is “looking into” ways for players to visit favored real-world locations virtually, “until they can once again visit them in person.”

Niantic is also highlighting game-specific changes that make it easier to complete objectives without leaving the house. That includes an earlier *Pokémon Go* update that heavily reduced the in-game cost of incense and Pokéballs, so players can catch virtual critters without the need to move.

“In areas where it is permitted by local authorities, outdoor walks, practiced with proper social distancing, will continue to be a great way to contribute to physical and mental well being and you’ll still be able to play our games while you do that,” the company said. “The changes we are making offer an alternative when that’s not possible.”

The forced changes are a bit ironic considering Niantic’s ongoing, zero-tolerance battles with automated bots. While

many used these unauthorized third-party services to level up quickly without actually playing the game, some used the GPS-spoofing functions to simply find creatures and virtually reach locations that they couldn’t reach in the real world. Now that we’re all stuck inside, though, that aspect of what used to be considered “cheating” is being embraced by Niantic, to a degree.

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