



Phase 3: Guidance for hill walking and climbing during COVID-19

From 11 September 2020

Mountaineering Scotland is the representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers in Scotland, with over 14,500 members and 162 affiliated walking, mountaineering and climbing clubs.

Mountaineering Scotland is committed to supporting the re-introduction of hillwalking, mountaineering, ski touring, outdoor and indoor climbing and bouldering in a safe and responsible way. These activities provide physical and mental health benefits for many people in Scotland, and we have been working closely with the Mountain Safety Group¹ and other partners in the outdoor sector to develop a route back to the hills and further guidance for Mountaineering Scotland members, and for anyone who takes part in these recreational activities, whether they walk, climb or ski.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide a framework for hill walkers and climbers within the current Scottish Government public health advice and phase of exit from lockdown, while highlighting additional considerations to be aware of in the presence of COVID-19 when taking part in these activities.

We urge everyone heading out to enjoy the outdoors to be mindful of how their individual actions reflect on the whole outdoor community. The key will be for individuals to take a sensible approach to their activities, use your judgement to manage the risks, and to consider the social responsibility we all have to each other, to protecting our emergency services and to minimise the transmission of COVID-19.

Key considerations in Phase 3

- **Be COVID aware** – follow the public health advice for physical distancing and hand hygiene.
- **Be prepared:** Check the status of car parks, toilets and other facilities before you go.
- **Be safe:** Plan ahead and stay well within your limits - whatever your activity - to avoid the need for rescue and emergency services.
- **Be considerate:** Think about how your actions might impact on others and follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code at all times.

COVID – 19 – A framework for decision making: Phase 3

On 10th September the Scottish Government published an updated 'route map' for Phase 3 of emerging from the coronavirus crisis, which is available [here](#).

Local lockdown measures may be in place – please check and keep to the information on the Scottish Government website if this applies to the area where you live:

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-measures/

Those who have been shielding should check the separate guidance and routemap [on the Scottish Government website](#).

IMPORTANT: Do not leave your home to undertake exercise or physical activity if Scottish Government advice means you should stay at home because you or someone you live with has or has had symptoms of COVID-19.

People who are symptomatic should self-isolate for 7 days; household members for 14 days as per the [NHS guidance](#). No one who is self-isolating should attend an outdoor sports activity.

We are also encouraging everyone to download the [Protect Scotland app](#) which, designed to help us protect each other, reduce the spread of coronavirus and avoid further lockdowns.

Please note: public health advice and guidance for Scotland may differ from that of England and Wales. Information on Scottish Government approach to managing COVID -19 is available at [Scottish Government: Coronavirus in Scotland](#)

Outdoor access during COVID-19

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code provides guidance for public and land managers. The key principles of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code are:

- **Respect the interests of others**
- **Care for the environment**
- **Take responsibility for your own actions**

The Scottish Government issued a statement on 9 April 2020 in relation to outdoor access for COVID-19. This advice supplements the existing advice in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and can the up to date information can be accessed following the link contained in "Further Information" section of this document.

General advice across all mountain activities at Phase 3:

- **Be COVID aware:**
 - You may meet outdoors with members of one other household, up to a maximum group size of 6, for informal exercise or activity. For information on sports culture and leisure activity see the information here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/sports-culture-and-leisure-activities/#Exercise%20and%20activity>
 - Be committed to hand hygiene - wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before leaving home and be cautious of touching surfaces eg gates, stiles. Further information on hand hygiene here: [Health Protection Scotland: Hand hygiene techniques](#)
 - Avoid sharing food, drink or equipment with other people.
 - Public transport is running at reduced capacity in some areas. If using public transport, adhere to Scottish Government physical distancing, face covering and travel guidelines – [see the Transport Scotland website for detailed information and guidance](#).
 - The cleaning of equipment, hand and respiratory hygiene are core measures to be implemented and provision should be made for these. Detailed guidance and advice is available at: www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings/
 - Hand sanitiser should be at least 60% alcohol based and detergent wipes appropriate for the surface they are being used on. Cleaning products should conform to EN14476 standards
- **Be prepared:**
 - Carry out a risk assessment for your proposed activity in advance and consider safety first. For an example risk assessment see here: www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/pdf/Risk-Assessment-summer-activities.pdf
 - Think about where you want to go and how you will get there and back again.
 - Prepare to be flexible and have alternative locations in mind if your chosen destination is busy or crowded – car parks in popular locations such as National Parks, popular Munros and climbing areas may be very busy.
 - Toilets, shops and cafes are reopening but some may still be closed, so don't rely on them – take everything you need with you.
 - Litter collection in rural areas may be limited. Please take a bag to put your litter in and #TakItHame.
 - Take your own first aid kit and include a COVID kit with sanitiser/soap, gloves, mask/ face covering.
- **Be safe:**
 - Choose activities that you know and have done safely for some time at a level well within your experience and competence, and that of anyone else you are with.
 - Navigation errors are a major cause of mountain rescue call outs, so refresh your navigation skills before heading out – find out more [here](#).

- Check the mountain weather forecast and ensure that you have appropriate equipment, footwear and clothing for what you plan to do and to look after yourself in case of an accident or injury. For more information visit the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#).
 - Mountain Rescue assistance may be limited, so plan to be self-reliant in the mountain environment, and should you need assistance be prepared to wait several hours for rescue.
- **Be considerate:**
 - Familiarise yourself with the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) and the rights and responsibilities that exist for the public and for land managers.
 - Be considerate of the sensitivities of local communities who may be wary of large numbers of visitors and the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
 - Please park with consideration for others and avoid blocking roads, driveways and access for other vehicles.
 - Respect the health and safety of farmers and others working the land – please follow all reasonable requests and signs to avoid particular areas, such as farmyards, and other busy working areas.
 - Be mindful of livestock with young, as well as nesting birds, especially if walking with a dog and / or climbing.
 - Be sure to know ‘where to go in the outdoors’ as public toilets may be shut, even for trips close to home. For more information, visit the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#).
 - Our advice is not to light fires or use disposable BBQs and please check local information and guidance.
 - Responsible wild camping is permitted.

Guidance for hill walkers

The continued presence of COVID-19 means that we need to take more care with our preparations and how we conduct ourselves while hill walking and getting to and from walks.

- Think about your intended route in advance - make sure you are clear where you are going and identify any particular hazards and potential escape routes.
- Tell someone where you are planning to go, when you expect to return, and what to do if you aren't back when expected.
- Check all your kit is in your rucksack as you may have taken things out to use elsewhere.
- Wearing brightly coloured clothing makes it easier to find you should this be necessary.

Before you go, ask yourself:

- Do I have the appropriate clothing and equipment for my planned trip and any emergency situation?
- Have I checked the weather forecast and planned appropriately?
- Do I have the necessary experience and skills to do what is planned?
- Do I have the skills to find my way, especially in poor visibility or darkness?
- Are all members of my group fit and confident enough to do what is planned?
- Have I got alternative plans in case it's busy where I want to go?

While you're walking:

- Know where you are and where you're going – navigation errors are a major cause of mountain rescue call-outs, so only go into terrain where you can be confident in your ability to navigate your route. **OS Locate** is a free app to help you find your grid reference if needed, but you still need to know how to find that on a map so that you can get yourself where you need to be!
- If meeting or passing other walkers you should maintain physical distancing and respect other people's space. Step to one side to allow a suitable passing distance to be maintained, especially at pinch points such as summits, trig points, gates, stiles and enclosed narrow paths, and at car parks and other entry points.

Guidance for climbing, scrambling and bouldering

Although expert advice suggests the risk of transmitting the virus outdoors is low there are very few medical studies looking into the survival of the virus on outdoor surfaces. For further information see an article by [Professor Ian Hall on behalf of the BMC](#).

On this basis we are advising climbers to take extra care with hand hygiene before, during and after climbing. We would also advise climbers who may be vulnerable and with underlying health risks to be especially vigilant.

Before you go ask yourself:

- Have you climbed outdoors before? If not, perhaps now is not the time to start unless you hire an instructor, book a course or can safely meet up with someone more experienced than you following the public health guidance on meeting people outdoors from out with your household, and maintain physical distancing.
- Is it likely to be busy? Try to avoid popular crags / boulder venues that might be busy with like-minded people, and might make physical distancing and hygiene difficult.
- Think about choosing venues that have plenty of circulation space around the crag so physical distancing can be maintained.
- Consider how you will keep your hands clean before, during and after climbing. Take hand sanitiser or some bottled water, hand wash and a towel with you.

Note: Hand sanitiser should be at least 60% alcohol based and detergent wipes appropriate for the surface they are being used on. Some liquid chinks contain 60% ethanol so worth considering as an alternative option. Cleaning products should conform to EN14476 standards

While you are climbing / scrambling:

- **Scale back your ambitions** - be cautious, choose objectives well within your own technical and physical limits to minimise the risk of accidents and injury, and to avoid pressure on emergency services.
- Maintain physical distancing, staying 2m apart with anyone from outside your household/extended household.
- Try to ensure your bags do not come into contact with other people's bags and only visit your bag if you are able to maintain physical distancing. Put your bag in a separate area if possible.

- Ensure you sanitise or thoroughly clean your hands after each climb / problem and ensure you do not touch your face.
- Don't hog the crag/boulder - show consideration to fellow climbers that are waiting to climb. Maybe consider a half day at a venue if it is busy and be prepared to be flexible.
- Communicate respectfully with fellow climbers. It is good to understand what people's intentions are and to work together so everyone can get their climbing fix. Ensure appropriate physical distancing at all times.
- Be aware of wildlife which may have moved into unexpected areas during lockdown: cliff-nesting birds are likely to be on new crags due to the lack of visitors and should not be disturbed.
- Cleaning of equipment can be done in some cases in line with the manufacturer's guidance (see link to guidance in "Further information").

Additional considerations for bouldering

- Spotting should only be carried out by members of your household.
- Do you have enough bouldering mats to build a suitable landing? Avoid lying/resting on mats and clean them after use.
- Can you avoid climbing with other groups/individuals you encounter out bouldering?
- Consider low level traverses and problems rather than high ball.

Additional considerations for climbing

- Do your buddy checks at a distance. Ask your partner to show you the checking rather than you checking yourself.
- Choose your routes carefully to ensure you are 2m apart from other climbers. This may mean leaving a route in between if necessary.
- Avoid single pitch routes where the leader and second need to share a small ledge or top out.
- Physical distancing will be difficult to achieve on multi pitch routes and will require advance planning and good local knowledge of routes so you can pick those with large stances.
- Think about how you manage your stance, consider belaying back from the edge and using technical solutions to ensure physical distancing can be maintained.
- Equipment:
 - Avoid sharing equipment where possible.
 - Minimise shared gear by doubling up on items where possible.
 - Avoid using your mouth when clipping ropes or placing gear.
 - Disinfect your hands with gel before and after each pitch.
 - Minimise exchanges of equipment whilst maintaining social distance.
 - Disinfect your hands with gel after handing over gear.

Phase 3: Clubs and huts

See separate guidance for affiliated clubs and club huts here:

www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/media-upload/Phase_3_Guidance_for_clubs.pdf

Phase 3: Overnight stays and accommodation

- **Holiday accommodation** – From the 15th July all holiday accommodation can open following the relevant guidance.
- **Bothies** remain closed, for more information and further updates visit the Mountain Bothies Association webpage www.mountainbothies.org.uk/ or [Facebook group](#).
- **Wild camping and campsites:** Wild camping is allowed from the 15th of July when campsites will also be permitted to open. Some campsites may remain closed or may be operating at a reduced capacity and have limited provision so we would advise to check in advance.

Phase 3: Coaches, Leaders and Guides

Paid and volunteer qualified coaches, leaders, instructors or guides should refer to their specific professional association guidance on good practice during this phase of the Scottish Government route map. Mountain Training Scotland have developed specific COVID-19 advice for leaders, coaches and instructors:

- www.mountain-training.org
- www.ami.org.uk
- www.bmg.org.uk/
- sportscotland.org.uk/covid-19/getting-coaches-ready-for-sport/

Further information

- COVID-19 public health guidelines for Scotland – staying at home and physical distancing: www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/
- COVID-19 advice from Health Protection Scotland on hand hygiene: www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/hand-hygiene/
- COVID-19: Framework for decision making – overview of public engagement: www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making-overview-public-engagement/
- Access to the outdoors during the coronavirus outbreak: guidance for the public and land managers: www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/access-outdoors-during-current-coronavirus-outbreak-guidance-public-and-land-managers
- Questions and Answers from Scottish Mountain Rescue: www.scottishmountainrescue.org/covid-19-information/

- Advice on cleaning and maintaining climbing equipment:
www.papertrail.io/blog/covid-19-links-and-resources-for-equipment-owners-and-managers
- Advice on for first aiders during COVID-19:
www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/covid-19-advice-for-first-aiders

Appendix 1

Phase 3 (updated 11/09/20)	
	As with previous phase but with the following changes:
Government and public health guidance for Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no restrictions on travel in Scotland if acting in line with all other guidance. There may be geographical differences depending on circumstances. • You are advised to meet people from no more than 1 other household at a time indoors or outdoors. You should stay at least 2 metres apart from people from other households at all times. This limit applies if meeting others at home, in an outdoor space including a garden or park, or in a pub, restaurant or café. See guidance on meeting others in a pub, restaurant, café or other indoor hospitality venue. • No more than 6 people in total (from a maximum of 2 households) should meet at any time in such settings, except as explained below. • A household can meet up to four other households per day in total (includes indoors/outdoors). • Children aged 0 to 11 from the 2 households meeting do not count in the maximum number of people meeting. They do not need to maintain physical distancing. This means that an adult from another household looking after young children does not need to physically distance from the child. However, care should be taken to follow hygiene measures and keep proximity to a minimum where possible. There is no limit to the number of households that children aged 0 to 11 can meet in one day but no more than 1 other household at a time. • Young people aged 12 to 17 can meet 1 other household at a time (in groups of up to 6 people in total), the same as adults. But there is no limit to the number of households that they can meet in one day, provided it is no more than 1 other household at a time. This means that young people can meet their friends separately from meetings that other members of their household may be having. • From 24th August organised group led walks for up to 30 people from any number of households are allowed following the steps outlined in our guidance for clubs. Contact details of all participants must be collected and retained for 21 days for each group lead walk and consideration should be

	<p>given to the particular risks to older members and those who have been shielding</p>
<p>Suggested activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillwalking to Munro level • Outdoor climbing, scrambling and bouldering • Club activities –group activities in line with public health guidance above.



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