

British Balloon and Airship Club (BBAC)

Guidance for Ballooning in Scotland during Coronavirus restrictions

This guidance is effective from 26th April 2021 subject to amendment due to anticipated changes being introduced by Scottish Government. The British Balloon and Airship Club will publish new guidance prior the next proposed change on 17th May 2021.

This guidance outlines how and what Ballooning can take place dependent on which protection level any local authority area is assigned to.

Our priority remains to protect the health of our participants and the wider community and help to suppress the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Please read the guidance below in conjunction with any updated Scottish Government guidance and continue to participate in Ballooning in a safe and considerate manner.

If you have any questions about the guidance please don't hesitate to contact BBAC Member in Scotland, Pete Forster on: 07775 666544 or email: pete@albaballooning.co.uk

Legislation

The sport of ballooning in the UK is legislated by the UK Government via the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) within the UK Department for Transport (DfT) under the General Aviation (GA) sector. Although aviation itself is non-devolved and legislated by the UK Government via the DfT/CAA, anything connected that occurs 'on the ground', is subject to local national Government rules, particularly in regards to travel and health matters. So, in order to conduct a balloon flight in Scotland whilst Covid restrictions exist, it is therefore necessary for participants to adhere to both DfT UK applicable guidance on General Aviation and Scottish Government guidance on travel and participation 'on the ground'.

UK General Aviation Covid guidance

In order to get GA conditionally resumed whilst Covid conditions exist, the DfT have issued a [General Aviation Guidance](#) but this Guidance states its applicability to GA flying in England only and refers those wishing to fly GA in the other three UK nations to their local national Government's general Covid restriction rules. This is because in order to include the exemptions (notably as regards physical distancing between households) within the GA Guidance, the DfT gained the approval from England health authorities only, leaving the GA community outside of England in limbo with no explicit GA Guidance for them.

Commercial balloon operators may find the DfT UK [aviation operator guidance](#) (which notes its applicability to some GA albeit without specifically mentioning ballooning) more helpful as it explicitly states that it applies UK wide but should be considered "alongside" any local national Government restrictions. The DfT GA Guidance unfortunately does not state the same but sense would suggest it be treated similarly in that it should be adhered to in regards to any restrictions on GA for the whole of the UK (as it is issued by the UK authority on GA – the DfT). Such restrictions may include a temporary cessation of GA or a limit on basket occupants, say, which may relate to current local national Government 'outdoor gathering' number restrictions or, in Scotland we might use any outdoor contact sport participation number restrictions, say, given that the Scottish Government accept that ballooning may be treated as such for the purposes of Covid guidance (see following sections).

So, in conclusion, we suggest that balloonists adhere to any DfT GA restrictions, interpreted if necessary based on any local national outdoor gathering else sport participation restrictions for basket occupancy but, outside of England, not apply any of the DfT GA Guidance exemptions unless provided

for in local national Government guidance for 'on the ground' aspects. It can be assumed that all 'in the air' (ie. non-devolved) aspects of GA are under the same UK wide rules, as indeed the CAA, within the DfT, have informed us is the case. Precedence in the Commercial Aviation transport sector suggests that UK aviation rules apply 'upon boarding' (as passengers may allowably sit adjacent regardless of which nation the aircraft is in).

Whilst GA is allowed by the DfT, the notable UK GA restriction is that, except when all basket occupants are from the same household, balloon passengers must wear a suitable face mask on board (ie. in the basket). The advice (as it's not a legal requirement) on whether the pilot, if not from the same household as all the passengers, should also wear a facemask onboard is discussed later within the BBAC Risk Assessment notes.

Scottish Government Covid guidance

The Scottish Government have agreed that hot air ballooning should be treated as an **organised contact sport** for the purposes of covid guidance and have also discussed and agreed this position with Transport Scotland which have authority over devolved aspects of aviation in Scotland. In order to resume a sport under Covid restrictions, sportscotland must provide their approval for the sport specific component of this guidance under which the sport must be conducted as prescribed in this document. Such guidance must be aligned to all relevant [Scottish Government guidance](#) and the sportscotland [Return to Sport and Physical Activity Guidance](#).

sportscotland recognise the British Balloon and Airship Club (BBAC) as the National Governing Body for the sport.

Organised Sport

Organised sporting activities can be undertaken, providing all activity is consistent with current Scottish Government guidance on health, physical distancing and hygiene – you will also need to make sure that your group, facility and participants are made aware and can adapt to changes in guidance at short notice. Information on Scottish Government's approach to managing COVID-19 is available at [Scottish Government: Coronavirus in Scotland](#) .

People who are symptomatic and their household members should self-isolate for 10 days as per NHS Scotland guidance. No one who is self-isolating should attend a sports facility or activity.

To manage a safe return to organised sport and physical activities all operators/owners should put in place Test & Protect procedures to help break chains of transmission of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Further information is available within this guidance and at [Scottish Government: Test & Protect](#).

Scottish Government's [Strategic Framework document \(version: April 21\)](#) for managing COVID-19 provides a 0-4 Level approach to restrictions with each local authority area (or sub-area) placed in a relevant protection Level depending upon its COVID-19 status which will be reviewed weekly.

Sports Governing Bodies (SGBs), operators and participants should be aware of their local area protection level and associated restrictions which may be in place and should consider this as part of risk assessment planning. Broad guidance for sporting activity which should be followed within each Level is set out in **Table A** below.

Further information on protection levels that apply in each local authority area are available at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): allocation of protection levels](#). A local post code checker is also available at [COVID restrictions by protection level in areas of Scotland](#).

The scope of this balloon sport guidance applies to the active participants (ie. pilot, crew and passengers) only. Any associated persons (such as any there to spectate at balloon launch) should be kept well apart from the activity and advised to adhere to overarching Covid guidance such as maintaining 2m separation between households.

Hot air ballooning falls within the definition of an “outdoor contact sport” within sportscotland’s [Return to Sport and Physical Activity Guidance](#): ‘contact’ sport or activity is defined as a sport or activity in which the participants necessarily come into bodily contact or as a matter of course encroach within 2m of one another. **Outdoor adult contact sport is expected to be allowed to resume when Scotland enters Protection Level 2 which currently has an indicative date of 17th May** (subject to confirmation by Scottish Government).

Ballooning participants are generally likely to be from multiple households and, at times, those households be within 2m of one another on the ground in preparing the balloon for flight and packing away post-flight and travelling by road transport back to a meeting point. For the purposes of being regarded as an “outdoor contact sport” for Covid guidance, the activity thus commences upon the participants arriving at the meeting point and ends no later than upon their return to it.

Table A: Sport & Physical Activity Protection Levels

		Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
OUTDOOR SPORT	Overview	An outdoor sporting ‘field of play bubble’ may consist of participants including coaches, officials and other support staff with maximum numbers allowed in each level noted below. Multiple bubbles can be used for training and SGB competition if appropriate guidance, set out within this document, is followed. Indoor and outdoor stadium, or equivalent events/competitions, involving spectators are subject to relevant Scottish Government guidance and approval. Other outdoor participation events are permitted subject to further Scottish Government clarification on numbers.				Local training/competition only. U12s: max 30 including coaches. Over 12s/adults max 15 including coaches.
	Organised outdoor sport, competition, events and Physical Activity (PA)	* Subject to SG Confirmation	* Subject to SG confirmation	*Subject to SG confirmation	Maximum of 30 participants.	
	Children & Young people (u18 years)	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	U12s: Contact sport permitted 12-17 years: Contact sport temporarily permitted up until the 25 April 2021. Non-contact only at Level 4 from 26 April 2021.
Adults (18+ years)				Non-contact sport & PA permitted Contact sport & PA prohibited	Non-contact sport & PA permitted Contact sport & PA prohibited	

Participants must adhere to currently applicable travel restrictions per [Scottish Government guidance](#) for sporting activity [Return to Sport and Physical Activity Guidance](#).

When a participant travels out with their home local authority area, they should follow the travel guidance detailed below. Travel regulations are now legally enforceable.

Participants in organised sporting or physical activity should, where possible, avoid any unnecessary travel out of their home local authority area and keep journeys within the area to an absolute minimum [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on travel and transport](#). Specific guidance on car sharing is available from [Transport Scotland: advice on how to travel safely](#).

Children & Young People (17 years or under)

- Participants aged **17 years or under** can travel to and from Level 0, 1 and 2 areas to take part in organised contact sport such as Ballooning.

Adults (18 years or over)

- Participants aged **18 years or over** can travel to and from a Level 0, 1 and 2 area to take part in **organised contact sport** such as Ballooning, from 17 May. They should not travel to a Level 3 or 4 area.

Travel restrictions may likewise apply to the flight itself if the take-off and landing locations were in different local authority areas, as may well occur in practice. There are no restrictions on the flight traversing over, or retrieve vehicle travelling through, a local authority area regardless of its Protection Level.

Each ballooning operation, whether operating commercially or privately, must:

- be undertaken in a structured and managed way
- follow this guidance and any other relevant guidance
- appoint a [COVID Officer](#) who has completed the free [sportscotland elearning](#), and
- who must produce an appropriate Risk Assessment and thereby establish a specific set of operating guidelines from the mitigations. It is the Covid Officer's responsibility to ensure that these operating guidelines are instigated, kept up to date with current issued guidance and adhered to.

Taking Bookings and Payment from customer participants

- Encourage people to make bookings online where possible. However, be aware that a proportion of disabled people, people from low income households and older adults do not have access to the internet. Ensure you have alternative measures in place. For example, telephone bookings.
- Where possible use online or contactless payment options and avoid handling cash. Where people do not have bank accounts it is okay to accept cash payments.

Communication with Participants / Customers

- Operators should communicate clearly and regularly with participants setting out what they are doing to manage risk, and what advice they are giving to individuals before, during and after participation in the activity.
- Make them aware in advance of measures you are putting in place at your venue, and guidelines they are asked to follow.

- Communicate clearly the operating times and how people can safely book and participate in the activity.
- Ensure signage on guidelines for participating safely and promoting hygiene measures are clearly displayed, up to date and in accessible formats where feasible.
- When communicating with participants prior to or after the activity, consider how you will reach people who do not have access to the internet. When publishing information on websites, consider how to make it accessible when accessed via a mobile phone or tablet rather than a PC or a laptop.

The BBAC have produced a template Risk Assessment (per below) which should be adapted as relevant to each balloonist’s operation. Operating guidelines can then be developed from the mitigation policies within the Risk Assessment and also from the guidance provided by the BBAC and the Commercial Ballooning Association (CBA), also provided below. These latter guidance can be used to enhance/aid the mitigations within the operator’s Risk Assessment as relevant for completeness of documentation.

BBAC Risk Assessment template

The BBAC Flying Committee have produced the following template Risk Assessment for BBAC members.

“The risk assessment for the permitted flights is not very complex. Risks need to be identified and quantified (high / medium / low / zero), firstly assuming you just behave as before Covid-19. Then risk-reduction procedures need to be identified and the risk then quantified again with the procedures in place. It is the pilot or operator’s responsibility to do the risk assessment. However, so it does not seem (perhaps) such a daunting task, the example below is provided from BBAC. Please adapt / expand it for your own circumstances. When ballooning, always be alert to new or unconsidered risks and be ready to do an “in the field” assessment of how to reduce them.”

RISK	SCORE UNMITIGATED	RISK REDUCTION MEASURE	SCORE MITIGATED
<i>Spread due to lack of social distancing in basket</i>	<i>MEDIUM</i>	<i>All basket occupants wear face-coverings (pilot discretionary subject to separate risk assessment of face covering wearing versus communications) *** NOTE 1. Face outwards during flight.</i>	<i>LOW</i>
<i>Spread due to touching shared (contaminated) surfaces (within given group)</i>	<i>MEDIUM</i>	<i>Hand sanitiser used. Gloves used (and sanitised). On training flights (shared controls) be rigorous with wearing and sanitising gloves.</i>	<i>LOW</i>
<i>Spread due to close working, possibly</i>	<i>MEDIUM</i>	<i>Group tasks to be conducted by members</i>	<i>LOW</i>

<i>combined with exercise / heavy respiration (e.g. packing balloon)</i>		<i>of same household where possible. Adjustment to packing process (e.g. people holding envelope bag face outwards)</i>	
<i>Spread due to contamination from previous flight's group</i>	<i>LOW-MEDIUM</i>	<i>(a) Quarantine equipment 72 hours (b) Clean bottom end key surfaces per manufacturers' instructions & clean vehicle / trailer surfaces with soapy water or disinfectant Clean burner controls etc. when training took place or if next pilot is different to previous pilot</i>	<i>(a) ZERO (b) VERY LOW</i>
<i>Spread due to travel in retrieve vehicles</i>	<i>MEDIUM-HIGH</i>	<i>Use face coverings for all people in vehicle, limit occupancy of vehicles (use more than one where possible), windows open, don't recirculate air (no use of air-conditioning) Limit numbers of people participating to the operationally required minimum</i>	<i>LOW +++ NOTE 2: see government guidance for taxis</i>
<i>Community spread due to ballooning activity</i>	<i>MEDIUM</i>	<i>Track and trace activity: keep records of everyone involved in the ballooning activity (air and ground) and inform all concerned if anyone develops symptoms within 14 days of the flight</i>	<i>LOW</i>
<i>Spread to / from landowners</i>	<i>LOW</i>	<i>Distanced interaction with landowners. Avoid entering farms' habited areas. Sanitise hands before & after touching gates, stiles etc.</i>	<i>VERY LOW</i>

**** NOTE 1: the DfT information is very clear: The guidance explicitly states that in ballooning with more than one household, everyone in the basket should wear a face-covering, provided it is safe to do so. This is not required for same-household or solo flying. It is down to each pilot or operator to determine via their risk assessment whether the pilot should wear a face-covering. As well as the benefits for Covid-19 protection, possible disbenefits due to compromises in communication with the passengers and in RT should be considered.*

+++ NOTE 2: See www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#taxis-and-private-hire-vehicles

The BBAC have noted on the specific topic of face coverings: *“Passengers must wear a face covering. It is not mandatory for pilots to wear a face covering. However, face coverings are recommended to be worn by all individuals on aircraft, where social distancing is not possible, where it is safe to do so. It is down to each pilot or operator to determine via their risk assessment whether the pilot should wear a face covering. As well as the benefits for Covid-19 protection, possible disbenefits due to compromises in communication with the passengers and in RT should be considered.”*

As noted, the above Risk Assessment is an approved template and should be adapted to one’s own operational relevance, using the below listed guidelines as an aid to enhance the mitigations (Risk Reduction Measures) as and whether appropriate. The aim, of course, is to minimise the risk of coronavirus transmission at all times.

Operating Advice and Guidelines

The 2020 BBAC Chairman, Paul Spellward, advised (regarding flying resumption in England in mid 2020 but equally relevant to Scotland in 2021):

“Some pilots will face a dilemma on whether to restart flying this season, perhaps due their own health/risk profile or to being cautious about ‘optional’ activities such as ballooning. I do advise pilots to restart if they reasonably can, since we all need to keep some level of currency. With some balloons out of annual inspection and uninsured for flying, perhaps now is the time for pilots to cooperate, share equipment and fly together.

Pilots, please take extra care on your initial flights of the year, allow more time and don’t be too ambitious. For anyone who decides not to restart this year, be assured the BBAC will be here for you in 2021 with advice and support. There are provisions in place to cover lack of licence ‘recency’ up to November 2020 and this may be extended. There may be a (reasonable) requirement for a check-flight or multiple instructor flights or similar for someone who wants to fly in 2021 and has not flown since 2019.

Many of us were concerned about landowners’ reaction to balloon flying this year. The BBAC has been seeking feedback from those flying recently and has only heard of landowners (and the wider public) being generally welcoming of balloons flying, not least as a sign of some degree of return towards normality. Please plan for a distanced interaction with the landowner and especially don’t take short-cuts this year which compromise relationships in the longer term.

The Commercial Ballooning Association (CBA), through chairman Steve Richards, have been working alongside the BBAC in the ‘return to flying’ negotiations. A supplementary set of Covid-19 guidelines covering the full process for ‘rides’ flights, including ground activities such as check-in, was issued by the CBA as a supplement to the general DfT mandate and BBAC guidance. The CBA has set up an instant news feed for CBA members via WhatsApp, which has been key to sharing

information and responding to queries. The CBA is not just for 'rides' companies; I'd encourage aerial work operators and individual commercial pilots to join too."

The Guidelines produced by the CBA referred to above, noting that they should be adapted as befits the scale of the commercial operation and modified for the conduct of a private flight, say, are:

Commercial Balloon Association (CBA) Covid 19 Guidelines

"We can operate hot air balloons (commercial and private) with passengers from outside the immediate household of the pilot, with normal passenger loadings/numbers.

Standard 2 metre distancing should be maintained whenever possible, reduced to 1 metre providing additional mitigation is employed (1m plus). The additional measures should include the wearing of an appropriate face covering for the duration of the time that the pax are on board the balloon and whilst the balloon is being packed away, and hand sanitisers should be available at check-in and on board the balloon.

As pilots and crew will be greeting/checking in passengers, if it is difficult to maintain the 2m distance pilots and crew will be expected to wear face coverings while checking pax in/handing out briefing cards etc.

During the check-in, the pax must be asked whether they are fit to fly, and are experiencing or have experienced recently any COVID symptoms. This should be included as part of an operator's risk assessment (referred to later). Clearly any passenger with such symptoms should not participate.

Pax current contact details must be checked/recorded at the site, and kept for a minimum of 21 days after each flight to aid test/trace measures in the event that any pax is tested COVID positive after the flight. The operator must record the contact details of the crew engaged on that flight for the same reason.

All surfaces that could be contacted by pax or crew should be sanitised prior to each flight. That will include the briefing cards (it is assumed that they're laminated), basket leather surfaces, handles, inflation fan frames and so on.

Pre-flight briefings should be conducted while maintaining 2m, or 1m plus, social distancing. This is obviously improved by holding briefings outside the basket, rather than asking pax to board for the briefing.

Followers, friends and family etc should be kept at the minimum of 2m social distancing at all times, or 1m plus where this is not possible.

Pax may be asked to assist with the balloon envelope extraction from the bag, and spreading out of the envelope, providing they have used hand sanitiser immediately prior to touching the balloon fabric. Operators should have sanitiser ready at hand for this purpose.

Boarding an inflated balloon should be done carefully, and once on board pax should face away from the next passenger boarding. Obviously, pax from the same household should be grouped together.

Once on board, pax should be encouraged to face away from each other as much as possible, with as much distancing as the basket will allow between groups from different households. It is accepted that neither the 2m or 1m plus distancing requirement will be met during the flight.

Pax should wear face coverings for the duration of the flight (in addition to any time that they are in a 1m plus situation).

Normal landing positions may be employed, and there should be no change or reduction of standards in normal landing procedures.

Pax should continue to wear face coverings after landing, or resume the 2m distancing as soon as practical.

Pax may assist crew with the packing away of the balloon, providing they have used hand sanitiser immediately prior to touching the balloon fabric. Operators should have sanitiser ready at hand for this purpose. Crew must wear face coverings and as much further mitigation measures as possible during the pack-away, and pilots should wear a face covering if they assist the crew. Additionally, pax should be spread out along the length of the envelope and crew should take steps to prevent the pax being in prolonged close contact with each other near the envelope bag etc.

Although not specifically referred to by the Dept for Transport, the CBA recommends that any post-flight champagne or similar toast ceremonies are suspended for the time being.

Pax should maintain the maximum possible social distancing while being escorted to the return transportation.

Operators should, as part of their risk assessment, ensure that commercial minibus operators follow a COVID-19 appropriate hygiene regime. If using their own vehicles, operators must ensure that the return transportation is thoroughly cleaned and sanitised after each flight, and prior to each flight if anyone has been in contact with interior surfaces after the previous clean. If possible, use multiple vehicles for return transportation to reduce the number of pax in prolonged close contact.

Operators must prepare a full risk assessment prior to the restart of operations, and update that assessment on a regular basis in light of experience gained whilst operating.”