



Guidance for hill walking and climbing during COVID-19

Updated: 16 April 2021

INTRODUCTION

From the 16th of April some of the rules on what you can and cannot do change to allow travel anywhere in Scotland for recreation and also to meet in groups of up to 6 adults from 6 households outdoors. The continued presence of COVID-19, and the new variants of the virus, means that we still need to take extra care with our preparations and how we conduct ourselves while hill walking, climbing and getting to and from walks/climbs. The purpose of this guidance is to provide a framework for hill walkers and climbers in Scotland to be used alongside the current Scottish Government public health advice, highlighting additional considerations to be aware of in the presence of COVID-19 when taking part in these activities.

LOCAL PROTECTION LEVELS IN SCOTLAND

A 5-level system of local measures is in place in Scotland.

Mainland Scotland and some islands are at Level 4. Some islands are at [Level 3](#). Please use the Scottish Government post code checker to find out which level your area is in,

- [Local protection levels by area](#) and [Post code checker](#) (Scottish Govt website)

Broad guidance for mountaineering activity within each protection level is set out in Table A below, and a summary of key points on the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#).

Under current Scottish law, you must not travel between Scotland and the rest of the UK, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man (the “Common Travel Area”) unless you have a reasonable excuse (see [exceptions](#))

Information on the Scottish Government approach to managing COVID -19 is available [here](#).

Note: For the purposes of the latest guidance all forms of walking and climbing are classed as non-contact sporting activity (except in an emergency)

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.

Please note: Public health advice and guidance for Scotland may differ from that of England and Wales. Guidance for England and Wales is available on the [BMC website](#).

We urge everyone heading out to enjoy the outdoors to be mindful of how their individual actions reflect on the whole outdoor community and to be aware of the concerns that rural and remote communities may have about the risk of transmission from areas where the virus is more prevalent. We ask 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 FOR ALL OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES:

- **Be COVID aware** – follow the public health advice for physical distancing, face coverings, hand hygiene, travel and meeting with others.
- **Be prepared:** Plan your activity and 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, be responsible and follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code at all times

BE COVID AWARE:

- Follow the current Scottish Government advice (FACTS):
 - Face coverings
 - Avoid crowded places
 - Clean hands regularly
 - Two metre distance
 - Self-isolate (10 days) and book a test if you have symptoms
- Download the [Protect Scotland app](#) which, designed to help us protect each other, reduce the spread of coronavirus and avoid further lockdowns.
- Be cautious of touching surfaces eg gates, stiles and clean your hands if you do touch a hard surface.
- Avoid sharing food, drink or equipment with other people.

BE PREPARED:

- 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.
- Think about your intended route in advance - make sure you are clear where you are going, what terrain you will encounter and identify any potential hazards and escape routes.
- From the 16th of April travel for outdoor recreation and exercise is allowed at the current Level 4, anywhere in Scotland.
- Meeting with others outdoors:
 - In level 3 and 4 areas up to six adults from six separate households can meet outdoors for informal sport or exercise. Children under 12 do not count towards the total number of people counted in a gathering.
 - In level 4 areas young people aged 12 to 17 can also meet outdoors in groups of up to six people from six different households for informal sport or exercise.
 - Where separate households are participating, 2m physical distancing should always be maintained.
 - The members of an individual household or extended household can meet for outdoor recreation.
 - The new Level 3 guidance which will come into force at 00:01 on 26 April has still to be updated.
- 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.
- Be self-sufficient and plan ahead to minimise potential contact with others by avoiding stops for fuel and using other facilities out-with your area where possible. Take everything you need with you including food, drink and a bag to put your litter in and #TakItHame.
- If you are planning to cycle to access a walk or a climb, additional advice is available from [Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland website](#).
- Car sharing and public transport - follow the current guidelines on the [Transport Scotland website](#)

BE SAFE:

- Navigation errors are a major cause of mountain rescue call outs, so refresh your navigation skills before heading out – find out more [here](#).
- Download the free [OS Locate app](#) to help you find your grid reference if needed.
- 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](#) (Hillwalking – Getting Started)
- Plan to be self-reliant and should you need assistance be prepared to wait several hours for rescue. If you are lost or injured and unable to get yourself to safety, call 999, ask for Police and then Mountain Rescue.
- Tell someone where you are planning to go, when you expect to return, and what to do if you aren't back when expected.

- Take your own first aid kit and include a COVID kit with sanitiser/soap, gloves, mask/ face covering.

BE CONSIDERATE:

- Familiarise yourself with the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) and the rights and responsibilities that exist for the public and for land managers.
- Park with consideration for others and avoid blocking roads, driveways and access for other vehicles – read more about [parking and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).
- Be considerate of the sensitivities of local communities who may be wary of visitors from other areas and the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
- Respect the health and safety of farmers and others working the land and be mindful of livestock and their young – follow all reasonable requests and signs to avoid particular areas, such as farmyards, and other busy working areas. Be aware of disturbing sheep during lambing season and keep dogs under control.
- If you need to go to the toilet outdoors, be sure to know how to do it responsibly - for more information, visit the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#) (Outdoor toileting)
- Avoid lighting fires or using disposable BBQs.

Read on for specific advice for:

- Hill walking/hiking
- Outdoor climbing/bouldering
- Indoor climbing/bouldering
- Further resources and information
- Table A: Mountain-related activities and protection levels
- Overnight stays and accommodation

GUIDANCE FOR HILL WALKERS

BEFORE YOU GO, ASK YOURSELF:

- Have I checked the current guidelines for my local area for travel and who I can meet up with for outdoor recreation?
- Do I have the appropriate clothing and equipment for my planned trip and any emergency situation? Check all your kit is in your rucksack and, if possible, wear brightly-coloured clothing to make it easier to find you should this be necessary.
- Have I checked the weather forecast and planned appropriately?
- Do I have the necessary experience and skills to do what is planned?
- Will I be able 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?

New to hill walking or climbing?

Find out more about planning your activities, weather forecasts, clothing and equipment on the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#) (Getting Started).

WHILE YOU'RE WALKING:

- Know where you are and where you're going – have the skills and equipment to navigate even in poor visibility.
- Keep to terrain where you can be confident in your ability to follow your route.
- If meeting or passing other walkers, maintain physical distancing and respect other people's space, especially at pinch points such as summits, trig points, gates, stiles and enclosed narrow paths, and at car parks and other entry points.

Read on for specific advice for:

- Outdoor climbing/bouldering
- Indoor climbing/bouldering
- Further resources and information
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GUIDANCE FOR CLIMBING, SCRAMBLING AND BOULDERING OUTDOORS

Climbers are advised to take extra care with hand hygiene before, during and after climbing.

Climbers who may be vulnerable and with underlying health risks should 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.
- Is it likely to be busy? Try to avoid popular crags / boulder venues that might be busy and make physical distancing and hygiene difficult.
- Choose venues that have plenty of circulation space around the crag so physical distancing can be maintained.
- Keep your hands clean before, during and after climbing. Take hand sanitiser or some bottled water, hand wash and a towel with you.
- 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.
 - Minimise exchanges of equipment whilst maintaining social distance.

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

WHILE YOU ARE CLIMBING / SCRAMBLING:

- Choose routes/problems well within your own technical and physical limits to minimise the risk of accidents and injury.
- 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 and only visit your bag if you are able to maintain physical distancing. Put your bag in a separate area if possible.
- Sanitise or thoroughly clean your hands after each climb / problem and avoid touching your face.
- Don't hog the crag/boulder - show consideration to fellow climbers that are waiting to climb 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 and plants on climbs and surrounding areas and in particular be sensitive to disturbing nesting birds and check the latest information on the Mountaineering Scotland website <https://www.mountaineering.scot/access/birds-and-nesting>.
- Cleaning of equipment can be done in some cases in line with the manufacturer's guidance (see link to guidance in "Further information" below).

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 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.

Read on for specific advice for:

- Indoor climbing/bouldering
- Table A: Mountain-related activities and protection levels
- Overnight stays and accommodation
- Further resources and information

GUIDANCE FOR CLIMBING AND BOULDERING INDOORS

Indoor climbing facilities may operate in level 0-3 areas with COVID measures in place as outlined in guidance produced by the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC), in association with ClimbScotland and sportscotland. Indoor facilities in level 4 areas must remain closed.

[See guidance for indoor climbing walls in Scotland here.](#)

Indoor climbing walls that are open have COVID guidelines and systems in place to ensure that visitors and staff can operate safely. [Find out which walls are open here.](#)

If you intend to visit an indoor climbing wall:

BE COVID AWARE

- Wear a face covering where required to do so
- Maintain 2m physical distancing from anyone that's not part of your household
- Clean your hands regularly between climbs
- Stay home if you have symptoms or are self-isolating

PLAN YOUR VISIT

- Check that the wall is open
- Read the guidelines for the specific wall you intend to visit as there may be slight differences between facilities depending on their size and layout
- Bookings may be required so plan ahead
- Check what you need to bring as hire equipment may not be available

STAY SAFE

- Remember to do a warm up before you climb
- Do your buddy checks every time you climb
- Take it easy to avoid injuries
- Stay focussed on climbing

RESPECT

- Follow the guidance at the wall and the instructions of staff at the venue
- Be considerate to other climbers
- Support your local wall

Read on for specific advice for:

- Overnight stays and accommodation
- Table A: Mountain-related activities and protection levels
- Further resources and information

OVERNIGHT STAYS AND ACCOMMODATION

- **Holiday accommodation:** Holiday accommodation for leisure purposes is closed under Level 4 restrictions, and may be operating under the relevant guidance in other areas. Leaving your home for overnight stays and to go on holiday in Scotland is expected from the 26th of April.
- **Wild camping and campsites:** Our understanding is that wild camping is permissible within your Local Authority area. The Scottish Government guidance states that you must not stay away overnight from your local council area until the 26th of April. If you are considering wild camping please do it responsibly and with consideration for others. Avoid busy areas, follow the current travel guidance and rules on meeting others outdoors, and always adhere to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Campsites remain closed and are expected to open along with tourism accommodation from 26 April 2021
- **Bothies** remain closed - for more information and further updates visit the Mountain Bothies Association webpage www.mountainbothies.org.uk or [Facebook group](#).

CLUBS AND HUTS

- See separate guidance for affiliated clubs and club huts on our website: www.mountaineering.scot/clubs

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/

TABLE A: MOUNTAIN-RELATED ACTIVITY & PROTECTION LEVELS (EFFECTIVE 5 APRIL 2021)

		Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
OUTDOOR Mountain-related activity	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.
		* Subject to SG Confirmation	* Subject to SG Confirmation	* Subject to SG Confirmation	Maximum of 30 participants.	
	Organised outdoor mountain related activity	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
	Adults (18+ years)				Non-contact sport permitted Contact sport & PA prohibited	Non-contact sport & PA permitted Contact sport & PA prohibited
INDOOR SPORT Organised indoor climbing and bouldering.	Overview	The number of participants allowed to take part in organised indoor sport or physical activity should follow Scottish Government guidance on the opening of sport and leisure facilities and sport specific SGB Guidance . ‘Group’ activity refers to adults, who take part in organised sport or physical activity, where the number of participants is larger than allowed under normal household rules. ‘Individual exercise’ refers to organised sport or physical activity which takes place within household rules i.e. 1:1 coaching. For further information see definitions within this guidance.				

	Children & Young people (u18 years)	Contact & non-contact sport permitted	Contact & non-contact sport permitted	Contact & non-contact sport permitted	Contact & non-contact sport permitted	Indoor sport prohibited: Leisure Centres, gyms and other indoor sports facilities closed. Exemptions available for professional /performance sport
	Adults (18+ years)		Non-contact sport permitted Contact sport prohibited	Non-contact sport permitted Contact sport prohibited	Indoor <u>individual exercise only</u> No contact or non-contact group activity	
COACHING	Overview	General guidance is available within this document for coaches, leaders, personal trainers, deliverers and instructors, <i>herein referred to as coach/es</i> . In addition Getting Coaches Ready for Sport provides a 4-stage approach/checklist to further support coaches to plan and deliver safe sessions.				
	Indoor & Outdoor coaching	The local protection Level in place for sport and physical activity will dictate what activity can be coached, indoors and outdoors and to whom in that area. See indoor / outdoor above for further information. Coaches can take multiple sessions per day, however the numbers allowed in each session will depend upon the protection Level in place.				
TRAVEL	Indoor / Outdoor Sport & Physical Activity	For further information please refer to the current Scottish Government travel guidance and the travel and transport information in the document above.				
WORKFORCE	Contractors & Staff	Sports facility operators must ensure that Scottish Government guidance on workforce planning in sport & leisure facilities is followed for contractors and staff and ensure existing health and safety advice is maintained and aligned. This should be detailed in the risk assessment.				
	Meeting Rooms	Although gym and leisure facilities can open up to Level 3, we would encourage providers to consider whether meetings and training must be completed in person or whether these can be completed online or via telephone. If it is essential that meetings and training takes place in person, Scottish Government guidance for general workplaces must be followed and a risk assessment should be completed.				

Read on for:

- Further information and resources

FURTHER INFORMATION & RESOURCES

- 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



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