



# Guidance for hill walking and climbing during COVID-19

Updated: 6 January 2021

## INTRODUCTION

The continued presence of COVID-19, and the new variant of the virus, means that we 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.**

Please use the Scottish Government post code checker to find out which level your area is in, and follow the guidance provided for outdoor recreation and exercise, travel and meeting with other households outdoors. 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](#).

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

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 and the local measures in place for 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
- **ThinkWINTER:** For specific advice on walking, climbing and ski-touring during the winter months, Mountaineering Scotland is leading the #ThinkWinter campaign with further information [available here](#)

An international team of researchers and mountaineers from Europe and North America has undertaken a detailed study into the impact of the virus on outdoor mountain sports. The paper is currently awaiting peer review and publication, but has been made available in draft form to help mountaineers improve their understanding of how to manage the risks. Although the risks whilst undertaking outdoor mountain sports are relatively low, we must remain vigilant and be aware of higher risk areas include travelling to and from the area you are visiting and staying in accommodation including club huts.

An introduction to the study and a copy of both the summary and full report can be found on the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#).

## 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.
- Travel for outdoor recreation including exercise is allowed at all levels, however we highlight the guidance at levels 3 and 4 in which you can travel within your local authority area, or up to 5 miles from the boundary of that area, to undertake informal outdoor exercise and recreation which starts and finishes at the same place, as long as you abide by the rules on meeting other households (see below).
- We are being encouraged to travel no further than is needed to reach a safe, non-crowded place to exercise in a socially distanced way. For advice on driving during the winter months see the advice from [Police Scotland here](#).
- Meeting with others outdoors:
  - In level 3 areas, you may meet with up to 6 people from a maximum of 2 households outdoors for informal exercise. Children under 12 do not count towards the total number of people counted in a gathering.
  - In level 4 areas you can only meet with one other person from one household outdoors for sport or exercise. Children under 12 do not count towards the total number of people counted in a gathering.
  - 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Responsible wild camping is permitted – more information on the [Mountaineering Scotland website](#) (Considerate Camping).

#### 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

## GUIDANCE FOR HILL WALKERS

### BEFORE YOU GO, ASK YOURSELF:

- Have I checked the 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 bright 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
- Table A: Mountain-related activities and protection levels

## GUIDANCE FOR CLIMBING, SCRAMBLING AND BOULDERING OUTDOORS

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](#).

**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.
- 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
- Further resources and information
- Table A: Mountain-related activities and protection levels

## 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.](#)

All 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



## OVERNIGHT STAYS AND ACCOMMODATION

- **Holiday accommodation** – Holiday accommodation for leisure purposes is closed under Level 4 restrictions, and operating under the relevant guidance in other areas.
- **Bothies** remain closed, for more information and further updates visit the Mountain Bothies Association webpage [www.mountainbothies.org.uk](http://www.mountainbothies.org.uk) or [Facebook group](#).
- **Wild camping and campsites:** Responsible wild camping is permitted although the current advice is to stay at home. Campsites may be closed or operating at a reduced capacity and have limited provision so we would advise to check in advance.

## CLUBS AND HUTS

- See separate guidance for affiliated clubs and club huts on our website: [www.mountaineering.scot/clubs](http://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](http://www.mountain-training.org)
- [www.ami.org.uk](http://www.ami.org.uk)
- [www.bmg.org.uk/](http://www.bmg.org.uk/)
- [sportscotland.org.uk/covid-19/getting-coaches-ready-for-sport/](http://sportscotland.org.uk/covid-19/getting-coaches-ready-for-sport/)

TABLE A: MOUNTAIN-RELATED ACTIVITY & PROTECTION LEVELS

		Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<b>OUTDOOR</b> Mountain-related activity	<b>Overview</b>	An outdoor sporting ‘field of play bubble’ can consist of a maximum of 30 people including coaches, officials and other support staff at any one time. Multiple bubbles, each with up to 30 people, can be used in training, competition or small-scale sporting events if all guidance is followed (200 max per day unless with exemption).				Scottish Government household number rules apply for exercise, sport and recreation.
	<b>Organised outdoor mountain related activity</b>	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	Contact & non-contact sport & PA permitted	Non-contact sport & PA permitted
	<b>Adults (18+ years)</b>				Non-contact sport permitted Contact sport & PA prohibited	
<b>INDOOR SPORT</b> Organised indoor climbing and bouldering.	<b>Overview</b>	The number of participants allowed to take part in organised indoor sport or physical activity should follow Scottish Government <a href="#">guidance on the opening of sport and leisure facilities</a> and sport specific <a href="#">SGB Guidance</a> . ‘Group’ activity refers to adults, from more than 2 households (6 members) who take part in organised sport or physical activity. ‘Individual exercise’ refers to organised sport or physical activity within household rules i.e. 1:1 coaching. For further information see definitions within this guidance.				
	<b>Children &amp; Young people (u18 years)</b>	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

	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	indoor sports facilities closed. Exemptions available for professional /performance sport
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 <a href="#">Getting Coaches Ready for Sport</a> 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 <a href="#">Scottish Government travel guidance</a> and the travel and transport information in the document above.				
WORKFORCE	Contractors & Staff	Sports facility operators must ensure that Scottish Government guidance on <a href="#">workforce planning in sport &amp; leisure facilities</a> 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	Consider whether meetings and training must be completed in person or whether alternative approaches can be used. If it is essential that meetings and training takes place in person, <a href="#">Scottish Government guidance for general workplaces</a> 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/](http://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/](http://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/](http://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](http://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/](http://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](http://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](http://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/covid-19-advice-for-first-aiders)



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