

## Update to the BMC Guidance on Reopening Club Huts

12<sup>th</sup> May 2021

### Executive Summary

*This updated guidance is issued jointly by the British Mountaineering Council and Mountaineering Scotland. Subject to individual risk assessments, we have amended our advice on disinfection between consecutive visits to now recommend either a 48-hour quarantine period; or non-user disinfection to an agreed procedure. This is considered proportionate from the date when huts may be used by multiple households, with the aspiration that all restrictions will subsequently be lifted in step with applicable home nation road maps to exit Covid restrictions.*



### Relative Risk

In line with current advice from the UK government and World Health Organisation, the BMC has amended its [guidance](#) on Covid-19 and reopening club huts. Scientifically nothing has changed from last summer when huts re-opened and the 72-hour quarantine period between visits was adopted. Case numbers were equally low then. What has changed is the vaccine rollout and thus peoples' risk or perception thereof, and the desire of the Government (and everyone!) for life to return to normal. We are united by a common desire to reopen huts as fully and as promptly as possible, in a manner that averts or mitigates Covid and other risks, so that the likelihood and severity of hazards is reduced to an acceptable level.

The original 72-hour period was based on the maximum time for which the virus could remain viable on different surfaces and potentially pass from one person to another via fomite transmission. Subsequent research now suggests that this poses a lower risk than airborne transmission via droplets or aerosols. Accordingly, a shorter period is sufficient to allow most of them to disperse, combined with effective ventilation and disinfection of touch points and surfaces where they may accumulate.

The transmission risk between successive groups of hut users is lower due to falling case rates. Mass vaccination across the UK is effective at reducing transmission and remains protective for at least six months, provided that there are no escaped mutations of the coronavirus. Risks may be further mitigated by disinfection in-between periods of hut use, conducted to professional standards, and/or allowing time between periods of occupancy for the biological decay of viral particles.

At present with self-catering accommodation use only by a single household bubble, the biggest risk to occupants beyond their own day-to-day activities may be from the previous user. Once we move to concurrent multiple household use (Step 3 for the road map in England, Level 2 in Scotland and Alert Level 2 in Wales), then the risks posed by the other households with whom you share and everyone they come into contact with are likely to dwarf the risks posed by any residual viral

particles from previous users. Therefore, the quarantine period becomes a much less significant defence than protective measures such as direct hygiene, social distancing and ventilation. Each hut is different, so hut operators and users should continue to conduct and document risk assessments and tailor their actions to the specific circumstances.

In summary, there has never been an absolute requirement for any quarantine period between consecutive users, and BMC advice has been to make the commercial decision of *either* leaving a 72-hour period to minimise the risk, or to undertake non-user disinfection. This remains the safest course, especially if there is doubt over the thoroughness of any disinfection being performed by hut users. However, once multiple indoor household occupancy is permitted a 48-hour quarantine period appears proportionate, with the aspiration that all restrictions will be lifted during Summer 2021.



### **Comparable Sectors**

What is different about mountaineering huts versus the commercial hospitality sector is whether the cleaning is done by specific trained staff following standard operating procedures, compared with untrained club members in a rush to leave and get home/to the crag! It is human nature to cut corners when you are not directly, tangibly affected, and to question/dispute/ignore parts of a standard operating procedure that you think aren't needed. Professional cleaners being paid, or hut operators (whether paid or not) are hopefully less susceptible to this. However, professional cleaning is probably only financially viable for huts with the prospect of significant mid-week bookings, which leads us back to the individual risk assessment and whether operators choose to keep a period between guests in lieu of cleaning by trained staff.

The counter argument to this is that when campsites with shared toilets and bathrooms re-open, there will be many shared touchpoints in facilities. These will be subject to enhanced cleaning regimes, but along with all other public and customer toilets, will not be disinfected between every use – making hygiene a personal responsibility.

### **The Future**

Hopefully the incidence of Covid-19 will continue to fall, more people will have had some immunisation protection and UK society will gradually open up whilst coming to terms with living with Covid-19. Lateral flow tests are now more widely available to detect potential infection before and after a meet. However, the [Cochrane review](#) concluded that the best available test would not only miss cases but would also create more false positive cases than identify real ones when case rates are low. Once restrictions are fully lifted, the emphasis will swing to people taking personal decisions based on their own medical history & perception of risk, the consequences of those risks materialising for them personally, and the need to safeguard other hut users and the local community.