



Phase 2: Guidance for hill walking and climbing during COVID-19

Mountaineering Scotland is the representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers in Scotland, with over 14,700 members and 153 affiliated walking, mountaineering and climbing clubs.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the lockdown, the 'Stay Home' and 'Stay Local' messages have been adopted by the majority of the mountaineering community in Scotland, leading to a marked reduction in mountaineering activities and mountain rescue callouts during this time.

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 2 remain

- **Stay local:** Follow the current public health guidance for Scotland to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.
- **Be prepared:** Car parks, toilets and other facilities may remain closed.
- **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 2

On 21 May, the Scottish Government published a ‘route map’ for emerging from the coronavirus crisis, with a four-phased approach to easing lockdown restrictions. Current information is available at [Scottish Government: Covid-19 Framework for decision making](#)

Examples of mountaineering activities considered appropriate at Phase 2 were agreed following feedback from Mountaineering Scotland members and in consultation with the Mountain Safety Group, and are outlined in Appendix 1.

Due to the level of concern about the potential for a second wave of infections the Scottish Government is taking a very cautious approach to easing lockdown. In Phase 2 the ‘Stay Local’ message continues, with travel for outdoor leisure and recreation limited to within your local area (approx. 5 miles). With the majority of car parks and public toilets still closed, it is important to take this into consideration when travelling for outdoor recreation and to plan accordingly.

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 info on NHS guidance. No one who is self-isolating should attend an outdoor sports activity.

Those who are shielding can now consider going outside for a walk, wheel or cycle or to take part in non-contact outdoor activities including hiking, while maintaining strict physical distancing and hand hygiene, and choosing areas and times that are less busy. Further information at [Scottish Government: Staying safe outdoors](#)

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 2

- **Stay Local and #BeCOVIDAware:**
 - Think about where you want to go and how you will get there and back again. In Phase 2 the travel advice is to stay within your local area (approx. 5 miles from home). [Scottish Government Phase 2: Travel](#)
 - Where possible avoid using public transport and adhere to Scottish Government physical distancing and travel guidelines: [Scottish Government Phase 2: Staying safe and protecting others](#)
 - Keep to local trips which **do not involve camping or other overnight stays.**
 - You are able to meet with up to two other households per day **outside** with physical distancing and a maximum group size of 8 people (including yourself): [Scottish Government Phase 2: Meeting Others](#)
 - Maintain physical distancing of 2m with anyone that is not part of your household.
 - 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. Information on hand hygiene is available at: [Health Protection Scotland: Hand hygiene techniques](#)
 - Avoid sharing food, drink or equipment with other people.
 - 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:**
 - Risk assess 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
 - 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 busy, or even closed.
 - Toilets, shops and cafes will 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.**
 - Avoid more remote areas and stick to local trips only.

- 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.
- Check 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.
- Navigation errors are a major cause of mountain rescue call outs, so refresh your navigation skills before heading out.
- **Be considerate:**
 - Please park with consideration for others and avoid blocking roads, driveways and access for other vehicles.
 - Be considerate of the sensitivities of local communities who may be wary of large numbers of visitors and the risk of COVID-19 transmission.
 - Familiarise yourself with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the rights and responsibilities that exist for the public and for land managers.
 - 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.
 - Current regulations in Scotland state that people can drive in their local area for exercise and recreation during Phase 2.
 - Be sure to know ‘where to go in the outdoors’ as public toilets will be shut, even for trips close to home. For more information, see this leaflet on our website: <https://www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/pdf/where-to-go-leaflet.pdf>
 - Avoid lighting fires or using disposable BBQs as fire risk is high.

Guidance for hillwalkers

The current situation means that we need to take more care with our preparations and remember you may not be as hill or climbing fit as you were before lockdown – over-doing it could result in injury or a call-out for mountain rescue teams.

Study 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 still 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, please maintain social distancing, 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

Indoor and outdoor climbing / scrambling has not been accessible to the majority of people during lockdown and we were successful in ensuring bouldering and some limited climbing activity was included at Phase 1.

As we move to Phase 2, we have outlined further guidance to help climbers keep themselves and others safe, with an emphasis on moving towards promoting individual responsibility and using good judgement to minimise the risks from COVID-19.

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: <https://www.thebmc.co.uk/covid-and-the-outdoors>

On this basis we are advising climbers to take extra care around hand hygiene before, during and after climbing, and to consider only climbing with people from your own household. 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 can safely meet up with someone more experienced than you following the public health guidance relating to meeting people outdoors from out with your household and maintain physical distancing.
- Is it likely to be busy? Try to stay away from 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. 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.
- Make sure you maintain physical distancing, staying 2m apart with anyone from outside your household.
- Try to ensure your bags are not in 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 gelafter handing over gear.

Phase 2: Clubs and huts

- In Phase 2 you can participate in outdoor non-contact activities including walking, bouldering, climbing and scrambling on your own, with members of your own household and with members of up to two other households. Groups should contain no more than 8 people, but less if possible. You should not meet people from more than two other households each day, for any reason.
- Vulnerable people or those that are shielding should exercise outdoors alone or with people from their own household only.
- If meeting with people from another household:
 - Travel separately and consider whether there will be adequate parking if travelling by car. Do you have an alternative plan if it's too busy where you are going?
 - Maintain physical distancing of at least 2m as well as cough/hand hygiene. Does the location you're planning to go to lend itself to adequate physical distancing within your own group and with other people?
 - Bring your own food, drink and equipment and avoid sharing equipment.
 - Ensure that any equipment used is cleaned or quarantined after use (see further resources).
 - Keep a note of who came along to help with contact tracing if this becomes necessary.
 - Think about how you would administer first aid if required – see [HSE website](#) and [St John Ambulance](#) for advice on first aid during COVID-19.
 - Think about how you can manage a situation where someone in your group is non-compliant with physical distancing or other measures in place.
- Club huts should remain closed although we are now working on further guidance and advice required for them to open safely in later Phases.

Phase 2: Coaches, Leaders and Guides

Paid and volunteer Qualified Coaches, Leaders, Instructors or Guides should cross reference their specific associations guidance on good practice during this phase of the Scottish Governments route map:

- www.mountain-training.org/
- www.ami.org.uk
- www.bmg.org.uk/

Appendix 1

| | Phase 2 |
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| | As with previous phase but with the following changes: |
| Government and public health guidance for Scotland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who are <u>shielding</u> are able to leave their home for exercise including non-contact outdoor activities (from 18th June) and to meet with one other household outdoors (max 8 people in total) with strict physical distancing. • People who are not shielding can now meet with more households outside. Limit increased from meeting one other household to meeting two households; 8 person overall limit and need for physical distancing remains. • Meeting people from another one household indoors with physical distancing and hygiene measures. • People are permitted to drive locally (broadly 5 miles) for leisure purposes. • May be geographical differences depending on circumstances. |
| Suggested activity level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hillwalking to Munro level within travel restrictions. • Outdoor climbing, scrambling and bouldering within travel restrictions. |

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/



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Document published: 19 June 2020