

BMC & Mountaineering Scotland statement on huts and clubs regarding COVID-19 pandemic

This statement represents the views of the BMC and Mountaineering Scotland regarding club meets and the use of club huts after taking advice from their medical and legal advisers, studying the advice of Public Health England and watching the policy in alpine regions with similar accommodation. It is current at the time of posting but is likely to change as the pandemic spreads further. We accept that being physically active in the hills has great health benefits both physically and psychologically, but that there is a difference in making a personal decision to travel to the hills with friends or family to enjoy the outdoors, and travelling as group to share mountain hut accommodation.

As the national bodies for mountaineering in Great Britain we can only advise individual mountaineers and clubs on risks involved.

COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person predominantly by cough droplets, but is also likely to be spread indirectly, via contact with surfaces that have been contaminated with cough droplets. Most club huts are made up of dormitory accommodation, sometimes in compact alpine bunks, with shared kitchens, toilets and washing facilities. Thus, club huts have the potential to be easy places for COVID-19 to spread. A dream home for a virulent virus. Furthermore, huts may well attract simultaneous groups from different regions of the country, enhancing the potential for virus spread. Many bunkhouses are privately owned, most B&Bs and hotels are privately owned and BMC and Mountaineering Scotland members also use campsites. We are aware of the economic implications of our advice in rural areas and to those clubs that own and operate huts. We will issue additional suggestions on economic considerations in the near future.

The majority of BMC and Mountaineering Scotland members have to travel to the hills to enjoy their sport. This is in itself a risk factor and they must make personal decisions about using public transport or sharing cars or minibuses. Obviously the longer a person is in close contact with a person who may be carrying the virus the higher the chance of transmission. It goes without saying that anybody with symptoms should self-isolate at home, and that anybody developing symptoms whilst away should head for home as soon as possible, making every effort to minimise interpersonal contact.

Camping wild in the hills is obviously fairly safe but attention must be paid to personal hygiene. Camping on sites in small groups with distance between tents is also relatively safe but attention must be paid to personal and group hygiene and in cleaning surfaces and facilities in any communal facilities. Living in your own self-contained campervan should be fairly effective as a form of isolation.

If a group is using a private bunkhouse it is for that group to make their own risk assessment but it would be sensible to know exactly what steps the owner has taken for thorough cleaning between group bookings. The same would apply to using B&B accommodation. There should be no embarrassment in asking about cleaning prior to arrival and provision of cleaning materials for the stay.

Advice for Club huts is in many ways much harder. Clubs obviously have a duty of care to their members, and to external groups that use the hut. Decisions should be based on discussion within the club, taking into account the health of all their members and also the design of the hut and any

owned surrounding land. These discussions are equally important within clubs and other groups that use huts that belong to other clubs.

It is possible that some members may choose to camp outside releasing more space inside for family room accommodation. Choices will still have to be made about shared facilities and ways to organize this. Clubs can expect their expenses on cleaning fluids, paper towels and other hygiene products to increase dramatically, and to need to re-stock supplies more frequently. **These products do not work if they are not used during and at the end of every visit.** Ultimately club members must make their own personal decisions which will be based on the limited known science but also their own personal medical history and social attitudes.

We reiterate that the situation is changing rapidly, and advice and both club and personal decisions may need to be revised accordingly.

For further information on Covid-19 transmission and UK government advice see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

Scottish Government advice can be found here:

<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

For further details on cleaning and decontamination see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

and

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Compiled by Dr David Hillebrandt, Hon Medical Advisor to the BMC after discussion with BMC and Mountaineering Scotland officers and advice from members of the British Mountain Medicine society.