



Phase 1 Guidance for a return to 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 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.

It must be stressed that an easing of lockdown at Phase 1 does not mean a return to normal, and 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 1

- **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

¹ Mountain Safety Group is chaired by Mountaineering Scotland and consists of representatives from Scottish Mountain Rescue, Police Scotland, Mountain Training Scotland, Association of Mountaineering Instructors, Scottish Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) and Glenmore Lodge

COVID – 19 – A framework for decision making: Phase 1

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. Examples of mountaineering activities considered appropriate at Phase 1 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. This first stage is considered an extension to the current lockdown to provide the opportunity for people to meet socially and access a wider number of activities for exercise. We understand that the continued restrictions on travel will be difficult for climbers and walkers and we are awaiting more information about what this might look like at Phase 2. The re-opening of car parks is also an essential next step in accessing the hills and will be complex to coordinate across a range of different organisations who own and operate car parks at popular locations.

While we are focused on Phase 1 at this early stage, we have also provided an indication of the activities that we have proposed for reintroduction at Phase 2 (see Appendix 1). **This is being provided for information only at this stage and will be subject to further assessment as the implementation of the route map out of lockdown progresses.** This guidance document will be reviewed and updated as we have further details and information about Phase 2 and beyond.

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, or you are in the most vulnerable category and have been advised to shield from the coronavirus.

People who are shielding should not visit venues or undertake activities. 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.

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 www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/

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 be accessed following the link contained in “Further Information” section of this document.

General advice across all mountain activities at Phase 1:

- **Stay Local and #BeCOVIDAware:**
 - Think about where you want to go and how you will get there and back again. In Phase 1, travel advice for exercise is to stay within a short distance of your local community (broadly within 5 miles) and travel by walk, wheel and cycle where possible.
 - Maintain physical distancing of 2m with anyone that is not part of your household.
 - Meeting outdoors with members of more than 1 other household at a time for outdoor exercise or activity is not permitted.
 - Be committed to hand hygiene and be cautious of touching surfaces eg gates, stiles.
 - 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/
- **Be prepared:**
 - Risk assess your proposed activity in advance and consider safety first. For an example risk assessment see here: <https://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 within your experience and competence, and that of anyone else you are with. Think of this phase as an extension of your daily exercise rather than a time for adventure.
 - Avoid more remote areas and stick to day trips only.
 - Mountain Rescue assistance may be limited, so plan to be self-reliant in the mountain environment, and prepare to spend a night out if injured.
 - 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 must stay local for exercise and recreation during Phase 1, but daily exercise and some outdoor non-contact leisure activities are also allowed.
- 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.

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 climbers and bouldering

Indoor and outdoor climbing has not been accessible to the majority of people during lockdown. As we start to enter a phased return to the sport we love, we have outlined our recommendations and considerations for climbers returning to help keep themselves and others safe.

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.

We have not included lead climbing at Phase 1 to avoid the potential of leader falls and also the increased risks around handling of equipment i.e no leader placed gear to take out. At this phase we are suggesting low level bouldering and top roping, similar to what we see in a climbing wall.

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 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.

While you are climbing:

- Make sure you maintain physical distancing staying 2m apart & don't share equipment with anyone outside your household.
- Ensure you sanitise or thoroughly clean your hands after each climb / problem and ensure you do not touch your face.
- Scale back your ambitions - be cautious, choose objectives within your own technical and physical limits to minimise the risk of accidents and injury, and to avoid pressure on emergency services.

- 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 social 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").

Key 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.

Key Considerations for Top Roping

- Is there good/safe access to the top of the crag to setup top ropes?
- Is space between you and other routes on the crag that might be getting climbed by others?

Guidance for clubs

- In Phase 1, club meets and group walks are not permissible. However, club members can take part in outdoor activities with members of their own household or with members of one other household in line with government guidelines around social distancing. We will be continuing to develop further guidance for clubs to assist them in restarting their activities safely as the phased exit from lockdown progresses.
- Club huts should remain closed.

Further information

COVID-19 public health guidelines for Scotland – staying at home and physical distancing:

<https://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:

<https://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:

<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/access-outdoors-during-current-coronavirus-outbreak-guidance-public-and-land-managers>

Questions and Answers from Scottish Mountain Rescue:

<https://www.scottishmountainrescue.org/covid-19-information/>

Advice on cleaning and maintaining climbing equipment:

<https://www.papertrail.io/blog/covid-19-links-and-resources-for-equipment-owners-and-managers>

Advice on for first aiders during COVID – 19:

<https://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/covid-19-advice-for-first-aiders/>

Appendix 1

	Lockdown	Phase 1	What next in Phase 2?
		<p>As with previous phase but with the following changes:</p>	<p>As with previous phase but with the following changes:</p>
<p>Government and public health guidance for Scotland</p>	<p>Physical distancing requirements in place.</p> <p>Stay at home.</p> <p>Essential travel only.</p>	<p>Meeting up with another household outdoors, in small numbers, including in gardens, but with physical distancing required.</p> <p>A maximum of eight people can meet from up to two households at any one time. Additionally members of a household should only meet with one other household per day.</p> <p>Permitted to travel short distances for outdoor leisure and exercise but advice to stay within a short distance of your local community (broadly within 5 miles) and travel by walk, wheel and cycle where possible.</p> <p>Non-contact, outdoor activities in your local areas e.g. golf, hiking, canoeing, outdoor swimming, angling.</p>	<p>Able to meet with larger groups including family and friends outside with physical distancing.</p> <p>Meeting people from another household indoors with physical distancing and hygiene measures.</p> <p>People are permitted to drive locally for leisure purposes.</p> <p>May be geographical differences depending on circumstances.</p>
<p>Suggested activity level</p>	<p>Daily (unlimited) exercise.</p>	<p>Hillwalking to Munro level within travel restrictions.</p> <p>Outdoor bouldering and top roping within travel restrictions.</p>	<p>Important: These activities are proposals which are not confirmed and will be subject to further assessment as more information about Phase 2 becomes available.</p> <p>As in Phase 1 with the addition of:</p> <p>Single pitch rock climbing (sport and trad) within travel restrictions.</p> <p>Subject to seasonal conditions, snowsport touring within travel restrictions, avoiding technical descents including gullies and extreme / steep terrain.</p> <p>Possibility of wild camping subject to further assessment and travel advice.</p>



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