



Covid-19 Advice for Hillwalkers and Climbers

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Current Advice	
Republic of Ireland	
Can I go hillwalking and climbing in the Republic of Ireland?	Yes – but subject to Government restrictions.
Where can I go?	Stay within a 5km radius of your home.
Who can I go with?	The maximum group size is 4 for people from outside your household.
Northern Ireland	
Can I go hillwalking and climbing in Northern Ireland?	Yes – but subject to Government restrictions.
Where can I go?	Stay local in accordance with Government restrictions.
Who can I go with?	Do not meet others, even friends or family.

Introduction

Since the arrival of Covid-19 on the island of Ireland, many aspects of our lives have changed. We have adjusted our behaviours; we have learnt to adapt to a new normal. As hillwalkers and climbers, our activities have been curtailed largely due to the restrictions on travel. With progress in the fight against Covid-19 we can look forward to a gradual lifting of these restrictions and a return to our activities.

Mountaineering Ireland has been preparing for a safe and responsible return to hillwalking and climbing. In doing so we have engaged with a range of stakeholders in six broad categories:

1. Participants - both members and non-members;
2. Landowners and land-managers;
3. Rescue organisations;
4. Other sports organisations;
5. People with medical and scientific expertise; and
6. Government departments and state agencies in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Part of this preparation has been producing specific advice to support hillwalkers and climbers in making a return to activity in a safe and responsible manner in the presence of Covid-19. This advice has been informed by input from members, staff and volunteers in the Hillwalking Committee, Climbing Committee and the Access & Conservation Committee. Underpinning this specific advice is the general public health advice issued on reducing the transmission of Covid-19.

The purpose of the advice is to highlight the additional considerations that hillwalkers and climbers should be aware of, in the presence of Covid-19. This advice builds on established good practice which is commonplace among hillwalkers and climbers; checking weather forecasts, checking access arrangements, selecting routes that are appropriate for fitness, skill and experience, environmental awareness etc.

- This advice is aimed at all hillwalkers and climbers;
- It is focused on the activities permitted in the early stages of the recovery plans;
- It will be updated as the situation evolves and;
- As new information becomes available.

Government Protocols and Public Health Guidelines

The publication of plans by government, in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, for the phased relaxation of restrictions provides guidance on when and how we can return to hillwalking and climbing. This advice is focused on the current and immediate stages of the government's regulations and plans. This advice will be updated as we progress through the government plans.

Northern Ireland

The recent announcement by NI Executive reaffirms the current position and sets out a phased relaxation in five steps. Although a date has not yet been set, it is expected to be around the 28th of May when Step 1 comes into effect.

The current position in Northern Ireland is to focus on daily exercise. Hillwalkers and climbers are asked to:

- Stay local;
- Stay low risk;
- Stay two metres apart.

Step 1 in the Northern Ireland Pathway to Recovery document approves of, "Outdoor activities (work and leisure) during which social distancing can be maintained for individuals who do not share a household contact and where there is no shared contact with hard surfaces."

Republic of Ireland

For the Republic of Ireland, subject to a review process, Phase 1 of the *Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business* will commence on the 18th of May. The key points to note for hillwalkers and climbers are:

- The distance you can leave your home for the purposes of exercise remains at 5km.
- People can engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities, either individually or in very small groups (maximum 4 people), where social distancing can be maintained and where there is no contact.

Social Responsibility

Government guidelines and restrictions may be prone to misinterpretation. If in doubt you should be guided by your sense of social responsibility and follow the spirit of the guidelines which are intended to reduce the transmission of the virus.

- Prevent the further spread of COVID-19;
- Protect the emergency services such as Mountain Rescue teams and Coast Guard units;
- Avoid any additional loading on our health services;
- Improve the public perception of hillwalker and climbers.

Rescue and Emergency Services

Scale back your ambitions be cautious, choose objectives within your technical and physical limits to minimise the risk of accidents and injury, and to avoid pressure on the emergency services.

- Choosing routes within your capability;
- Being prepared to self-rescue;
- Choosing routes in less remote locations.

Landowners and Rural Communities

Landowners and rural communities who are normally welcoming of hillwalkers and climbers may have concerns over an influx of visitors in this current time.

- Please respect the wishes of landowners and rural communities;
- If possible, park in locations that are not close to houses;
- Plan your route to avoid homes and farm-buildings.

When we can return to hillwalking and climbing, we will need to be even more prudent in planning all aspects of our activity. Our choice of venue, how we travel there, where we park and even where we might get food should all now be considered to a degree which we may not have done before.

By planning ahead, considering potential issues and formulating alternatives, you are far more likely to have a good experience.

Location

In choosing an appropriate activity location consider;

- How popular the location is and whether there is an alternative venue (Plan B).
- Is your planned location within the current travel restrictions?
- Is it possible to walk or cycle to the starting point to reduce parking congestion?
- Does the venue allow you to choose routes you are familiar with and does it suit you and/or the group's ability?
- Is there an alternative if your chosen location is too busy?
- Can you do your activity off-peak? You will meet fewer people if you go out mid-week or at off-peak times such as early morning.
- See appendix for links to useful information on opening hours, any restrictions in place and other advice before setting out.
- Only take dogs where they are permitted, and keep your dog on a lead to prevent interaction with other people, and to protect wildlife and farm animals

Advice to clubs on choosing location

- As people who know the trails and hills, try to encourage members to use less popular venues, which should be less busy.
- If there are multiple groups going out from your club, try to use different routes, especially when we have the option to go further.
- Ireland's network of marked walking trails provides useful, low-risk activity locations for club groups, especially where members are not confident in their navigational ability.

Group Size

People can exercise - either on their own, with existing members of their household or in a maximum group of 4 in the Republic of Ireland effective from Phase 1 and a maximum of 6 in Northern Ireland effective from Step 1 who are not from the same household - where physical distancing can be maintained. However, vulnerable people are advised by government to continue to exercise alone or only with existing members of their household.

Key considerations on group sizes

- Stay within the group sizes advised by government.
- Going hillwalking or climbing on your own may seem like the perfect example of physical distancing. However, in the event of an injury, even a minor injury you may not be able to self-rescue. If you go in a small group, you may be able to self-rescue without the need for Mountain Rescue.

Travel

Any travelling for exercise should be within the radius set by the government for each phase.

Key considerations for travel

- Are the people you are travelling with from the same household?
- Can you maintain appropriate physical distancing while travelling?
- Can you minimise stops on your journey?
- What are the implications of stopping at different locations for food and coffee to and from walks?
- If using buses /public transport, make adequate contingencies to practice hygiene and physical distancing.

Parking

There may be a much larger number of people from the general population now using the same car parks which we access the hills and crags from. Other car parks may simply be closed.

Key considerations for parking

- If possible, check if a car park is opened before travelling.
- Have a backup plan. If on arrival you find the car park is full or closed what is your best alternative?
- Will the Emergency services, local farmers or neighbours be able to access fields, forests, or houses where you intend to park?
- If parking on the roadside is there enough space for large vehicles to pass and to turn into entrances?

Equipment:

- Carry a first aid kit to be self-reliant for minor incidents.
- Carry hand sanitiser or some means of washing your hands.
- Carry a facemask for times when physical distancing is not possible e.g. emergencies, unplanned proximity at belays etc.
- Minimise sharing of equipment.
- After hillwalking or climbing, quarantine your equipment for 72 hours, or wash it appropriately, before going out again with another person.

It should be noted that Mountaineering Ireland members who go walking /climbing outside of club-organised activities are covered under Mountaineering Ireland's insurance policy.

Hillwalking lends itself to physical distancing which can be carried out individually or in small groups. With minor changes to our practices we can make hillwalking even safer.

Key Considerations when hillwalking

- Are you familiar with your chosen route?
- Is your chosen route comfortably within your capabilities?
- Responsibility for maintaining physical distance and appropriate hygiene practices within the group should be shared, rather than the leader's responsibility (if there is a leader).
- If you meet another group step to one side to let them pass or walk in single file.
If passing others, make sure to allow at least 2 metres space.
- It is important to maintain social distance within your group and when you come across others.
- Be especially mindful of not gathering together around a map, at summits, or for photos,
- Be extra vigilant on maintaining distance when breathing hard during ascent and whilst stopped at gates / stiles, try not to touch each other's gear (holding someone's poles/climbing gear while they climb over a gate/stile, locating the tube of your hydration pack, etc)

This advice will help plan for a safe and responsible return to climbing in the presence of Covid-19. This advice should be considered in addition to your normal good practice. Apply common sense and use your experience and intuition as a climber to make sensible decisions.

Key Considerations for trad climbing and sport climbing

- To facilitate physical distancing choose climbs with room at the bottom and top. If this is not possible you can lower your partner before they reach the top.
- If you usually do not wear a helmet, consider using one to reduce risk of injury
- It is not advisable to Multi-pitch climb with someone who is not from your household at this time as it is unlikely you will be able to maintain adequate social distancing.

Key Considerations for Bouldering

- Due to the occasional physical contact that comes about when spotting this should be carried out by members of your household as much as possible.
- Are you bouldering within your limits and choosing problems that have low risk of injury?
- Do you have enough boulder mats to build a suitable landing?
- If you see chalk on your chosen problem – what should you consider?
- Can you avoiding climbing with other groups/individuals you encounter out bouldering?

Resources

The following are links to useful information for both climbers and hillwalkers during Covid-19

Keep up today with Advice:

[Republic of Ireland Government](#)

[Northern Ireland Assembly](#)

[Mountaineering Ireland](#)

[Sport Ireland](#)

[Sport Northern Ireland](#)

[Mountain Rescue Ireland](#)

Information on locations:

[Sport Ireland Outdoors](#)

[Walk NI](#)

[Northern Ireland National Trust](#)

[Mountain Views](#)

[Coillte – Forest Parks and other forest sites](#)

[National Parks and Wildlife Service](#)

Equipment maintenance and cleaning:

[DMM: COVID-19: Care, Cleaning & Disinfection of DMM Equipment](#)

[Petzl: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISINFECTING YOUR EQUIPMENT](#)

[Beal: How to disinfect BEAL Textile PPE during the COVID-19 crisis](#)

[Lyon Equipment: Guidance Notes](#)

Refresh Your Skills:

[Mountaineering Ireland – YouTube channel](#)

[View Ranger – YouTube channel](#)

Excerpts from Government Recovery Plans

Republic of Ireland

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
	18th May	8th June	29th June	20th July	10th August
The distance you can leave your home for the purposes of exercise	5km	20km	20km	You can extend travel to outside of your region	You can extend travel to outside of your region
Other (non-commercial) social events				Small social (non-family) gatherings limited to a maximum number of participants for a limited period of time where social distancing can be maintained	Large social (non-family) gatherings restricted due to risk
Sport	Permit people to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities, either individually or in very small groups (maximum 4 people), where social distancing can be maintained and where there is no contact				Open gyms, exercise, dance studios and sports clubs, only where regular and effective cleaning can be carried out and social distancing can be maintained

Northern Ireland

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Sport, cultural and leisure activities	Outdoor activities (work and leisure) during which social distancing can be maintained for individuals who do not share a household contact and where there is no shared contact with hard surfaces.	Outdoor activities involving small groups of less than 10 people during which it may be difficult to maintain social distancing but where contacts are brief (less than 10 minutes).	Outdoor activities involving larger groups of less than 30 people during which it may be difficult to maintain social distancing but where contacts are brief (less than 10 minutes).	Outdoor gatherings involving larger numbers of individuals where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple contacts of less than 10 minutes are likely.	Indoor gatherings of large numbers of people where social distancing cannot be easily maintained and multiple contacts of more than 10 minutes are likely.