

Statement from Mountaineering Ireland & Mountain Training Board Ireland to voluntary & commercial leaders of hillwalking and climbing operating in Northern Ireland.

The UK government recently relaxed lockdown restrictions to allow unrestricted travel and permit groups of up to 10 people from different households to meet in Northern Ireland, (see, [Northern Ireland](#) for further guidance.

- *There is no limit on the distance travelled in Northern Ireland.*
- *Travel to the republic of Ireland must strictly adhere to the guidance in place there.*
- *Groups of up to 10 people outdoors as long as you maintain social distancing by being at least 2 metres apart and maintaining hand and respiratory hygiene practices.*
- *Maintain physical/social distancing of 2 metres as per government guidance*
- *You should also enforce strong hygiene measures. This might be cleaning any equipment rigorously in line with wider guidance on hygiene, for example by using antiviral spray and washing hands thoroughly before and after use*

Mountaineering Ireland & Mountain Training Board Ireland has considered the guidance above and believe it may now be possible for volunteer & commercial leaders to engage in led activity in Northern Ireland subject to appropriate control measures. See further guidance for business and workers [here](#).

The latest general UK Government update for Northern Ireland is here [Northern Ireland](#) and Recovery Plan [here](#); (see specific guidance for the Republic of Ireland [here](#), within the Northern Ireland update it includes:

At all times, you should continue to adhere to strict social distancing guidelines when you are outside your home, particularly ensuring you are two metres away from anyone outside your household.

It is really important that everyone continues to:

- follow the advice being offered by the Government based on medical and scientific evidence, including the current 'stay at home' advice while that remains in place
- wash our hands regularly and in line with the best practice guidance
- have good respiratory hygiene in terms of coughing or sneezing into a tissue or the crook of your elbow
- follow the social distancing guidelines and stay two metres away from those outside your household whenever possible
- consider the use of cloth face coverings (mouth and nose) for short periods of time when you are in enclosed spaces where social distancing cannot be maintained. For example, when using public transport and while in some shops
- abide by the need to self-isolate either because you have symptoms or because you have been in touch with someone who has symptoms or has tested positive for coronavirus. This includes if contacted by the contact tracing arrangements in place
- The NI Executive also ask those in society with responsibilities to exercise them in line with up-to-date public health guidance. So there is an onus on businesses, schools, churches, sporting organisations and many others to show how they can accommodate the current social distancing and other requirements if they are seeking agreement to recommence their activities.

Activities may not lend themselves to involve overnight stays (including camping) or the use of indoor venues for briefings or debriefs. Climbing walls or facilities may or may not yet be used. Note: Groups permitted, of up to 10 outdoors while maintaining social distancing at all times, pertinent and relevant for led activities.

To make any decision on whether to go ahead with an activity, please consider the usual factors and include those additional factors brought about by Covid – 19 including government guidance, parking, mountain rescue service capacity. Our [guidance on safe practice in the outdoors](#) issued to Mountain Training Association members may also prove useful. Leaders are responsible for the safety of their staff and group, need to have satisfied their own risk assessment about Covid-19 as well as having appropriate insurance cover in place.

Although MI & MTBI appreciates that leaders have a genuine need to return to work and will be keen to get back to leading a cautious approach will be necessary to both limit the spread of infection and respect local sentiment. As such providers in Northern Ireland should take note of local information and advice from organisations such as their own membership organisations (AMI, BAIML, BMG and MTA), Mountaineering Councils (MI, the BMC, MS), National Park Authorities, National Parks & Wildlife Services, Mountain Rescue Teams and local Tourist Boards. Leaders must consider the reputation of our sector or group and act accordingly.

It is important that our network of leaders maintain the quality of what we do. We are presently considering how we can further support leaders during these challenging times and welcome dialogue.

I have created an email group of service providers and award holders. If you wish to be added to this email list, please confirm by return.

Finally, please note once again that this currently only affects leaders in Northern Ireland. As the situation develops in other countries, we will issue further coordinated updates. The guidance for Northern Ireland may change in line with the Government's advice and may need to be reversed if required. Please contact Jane Carney to discuss further as required.

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