



Covid-19 Advice for Hillwalkers and Climbers



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Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Considerate

Since the arrival of COVID-19 on the island of Ireland, many aspects of our lives have changed. Together, we have adhered to government restrictions and public health advice. Thanks to this collective effort, progress has been made in the fight against COVID-19 allowing a significant easing of restrictions imposed in March, April, May.

However, we must remember that COVID-19 remains, and that we all play our part in keeping it suppressed. As restrictions ease our personal and social responsibility become ever more important. This is evident most recently with the level of transmissions rising.

Everyone should continue to be aware of the risk factors for getting COVID-19:

Distance – The risk of getting COVID-19 increases as the distance between you and others gets smaller. Keep 2 metres apart where possible.

Activity – How you spend time with people and what you do with them can increase your risk. Follow the government’s Stay Safe Guidelines when spending time with others.

Time – The more time you spend in close contact with other people can increase your risk of getting COVID-19. Keep track of who you spend time with and how.

Environment – Being outdoors is safer than being indoors. Where possible, meet with others outdoors. If this is not possible, keep windows and doors open when meeting others inside

Symptoms – Know the symptoms. If you have them self-isolate and contact your GP immediately.

In preparing this advice to aid a safe and responsible return to hillwalking and climbing, Mountaineering Ireland 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.

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

The publication of plans by government, in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, for the phased relaxation of restrictions provides high level guidance on when and how we can return to hillwalking and climbing. To view the current information from government please click on the relevant links below:

- Northern Ireland: [Northern Ireland Assembly](#)
- Republic of Ireland: [Republic of Ireland Government](#)

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.

This advice should be considered in addition to your normal good practice. Apply common sense and use your experience and intuition to make sensible decisions.

Landowners and Rural Communities

Since the easing of lockdown, there has been a significant increase in footfall to the uplands. Please be mindful and respectful of the landowners and local communities in the places where you walk and climb. People living in rural areas may be nervous to see groups of people coming into the area. Consider too that upland areas have a higher proportion of older residents.

- Please respect rural residents by keeping your group size small (see below).
- If possible, park in locations that are not close to houses.
- Plan your route to avoid passing close to homes and through farmyards.
- Some of the cafés and pubs you would have visited previously may not be open, so bring the supplies you need, but where services are open and have space, please support them.
- Some toilet facilities may not be open.

Clubs

- Clubs with organised activities and events should appoint a *COVID-19 Contact*. This person will act to inform club members and implement best practice regarding COVID-19.
 - Completing the Sport Ireland COVID-19 Return to Sport online course will provide additional information on the role of the *COVID-19 Contact* within a club. Please click here: [Sport Ireland COVID-19 Return to Sport Online Course](#)
- Participants in organised activities and events should provide a *COVID-19 Declaration* in advance each time you go out (please see Appendix 1). The three key questions are:
 - Have you travelled abroad in the past 14 days to a country not on the Green List?
 - Have you had any of the symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
 - Have you been in contact with anyone who has COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

To comply with GDPR participants consent should be sought before this information is shared with the club committee. Assurances should be given that this information will not be shared or used for any other purposes.

- For the purpose of *Contact Tracing* a digital record of participant's personal details should be kept. The club activity list that you use for organised activities can be used for this purpose (please see Appendix 2), additionally you can encourage members to download the relevant contact tracing app.

Choosing Locations

- Consider how popular the location is and whether there is an alternative venue?
- As people who know the mountains, choose less popular venues, which should be less busy.
- Does the venue provide you with a choice of routes should your chosen route be too busy?
- Can you do your activity at off-peak times such as mid-week or early in the day?
- Take dogs only where they are permitted. Keep your dog on a lead to prevent interaction with other people, and to protect wildlife and farm animals.
- Large clubs with multiple groups should use different locations and routes.
- Marked walking trails provides useful locations with a lesser demand on navigational skills.

If you have any queries or feedback regarding access, please contact Mountaineering Ireland's Access & Conservation Officer Helen Lawless.

E-mail: helen@mountaineering.ie

Group Size

- Stay within the group sizes advised by government.
- Mountaineering Ireland's advice is that group sizes should be kept small, ideally less than 10, and should not exceed 15, or the government's prescribed number whichever is lower. As well as making parking and social distancing easier, a smaller group size will reduce environmental impact and allow for easier group management.
- 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.

Travel

- With the exception of localised restrictions, travel within the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, as well as cross-border travel is permitted.
- You should not share private vehicles with people from outside your household. If this is not possible such as in the case of an emergency, face coverings should be worn when sharing a vehicle.
- If using private buses, ensure that adequate hygiene and physical distancing practices are adhered to.

Parking

- Car parking capacity has been considerably reduced due to the restrictions on car-pooling, previously four people in a car would have taken one carparking space, now those four people will likely require four spaces.
- Car-parking spaces will be in high demand – consider alternative less popular areas for parking.
- When parking, be considerate of other road users. Do not block access for residents, emergency services or farmers who may need to enter fields or farmyards.

Equipment

- Include facemasks and additional gloves in your first-aid kit.
- Carry hand sanitizer or some means of washing your hands.
- Use a facemask for times when physical distancing is not possible.
- 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.

When Hillwalking

- Take time to regain your fitness and refresh skills.
- Keep 2 metres apart where possible, 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 and make sure to allow at least 2 metres space.

- 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). Be especially mindful of not gathering together around a map, at summits, or for photos.
- Carry a spare bag to take home any fruit peels, packaging etc from your snacks and consider picking up (with care) any litter you come across in outdoor spaces.
- If you come across rubbish or dumping that is more than you and your friends can deal with, phone the National Environmental Complaints line 1850 365 121, or use the 'See It, Say It' app, in Northern Ireland call the Environmental Crime number - 0800 80 70 60

If you have any queries regarding hillwalking, please contact Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking Development Officer Ruth Whelan. E-mail: ruth@mountaineering.ie

When Climbing

- Take time to regain your fitness and refresh skills.
- Aim to minimise time spent within 2m of your climbing partner.
- When bouldering, spotting should be carried out by members of your household as much as possible.
- Be aware that climbs may be a little dirty and overgrown due to a lack of activity.

If you have any queries regarding climbing, please contact Mountaineering Ireland's Climbing Officer Damien O'Sullivan. E-mail: damien@mountaineering.ie

Key Considerations for commercial and voluntary led activities

- Appropriate insurance cover.
- Move briefings outdoors or online.
- Revisit your risk assessments and operating procedures.
- Include a COVID - 19 questionnaire for your participants, e.g. temperature, contact with known cases, etc.
- Revisit your leadership decision making, e.g. group size, venue & activity choice.
- Equipment sharing, social/physical distancing & hygiene procedures.
- First Aid; Administering, personal PPE, renewing & updating your certificate.
- Mountain Rescue service (COVID - 19 protocols may reduce response time, increased participation may increase callouts, PPE resources may be limited).

For further information on commercial and voluntary led activities please click on the links below:

- Northern Ireland: [MI-MTBI Leaders Guidance NI 29-06-2020](#)
- Republic of Ireland: [MI-MTBI Leaders Guidance Ireland phase 3](#)

If you have any queries regarding commercial or voluntary led activities, please contact Mountaineering Ireland's Training Officer Jane Carney. E-mail: jane@mountaineering.ie

Resources

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

Keep up to date with advice:

- [Republic of Ireland Government](#)
- [Northern Ireland Assembly](#)
- [Mountaineering Ireland](#)
- [Get Ireland Walking](#)
- [Sport Ireland](#)
- [Sport Northern Ireland](#)
- [Mountain Rescue Ireland](#)
- [Mountain Training](#)

Information on locations:

- [Sport Ireland Outdoors](#)
- [Walk NI](#)
- [NI Direct](#)
- [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](#)

Appendix 1 - COVID – 19 Participation Declaration

Have you travelled abroad in the past 14 days to a country not on the Green List?

Yes No

Have you had any of the symptoms of COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

Yes No

Have you been in contact with anyone who has COVID-19 in the past 14 days?

Yes No

I consent to my special category personal data provided to be shared with the club committee for the purposes of the delivery of my safe participation in club activity. This data will not be shared or processed for any other purpose.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2 – Sample - Club Members and Guest Activity List

Hill walking, climbing and rambling are activities that can be challenging and may result in personal injury or death. Participants should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Date / /	Location:	Leader(s):
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	Name	Mobile No	I.C.E. No.	COVID-19 Declaration signed	Club Member
1				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
2				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
6				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
7				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
8				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
9				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
10				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
11				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
12				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
13				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
14				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
15				Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>