



Speleological
UNION OF IRELAND

COVID-19 Return to Sport Procedure

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Current Advice

Republic of Ireland (From June 29th)

Can I go caving in the Republic of Ireland?	Yes – but subject to Government restrictions.
Where can I go?	You can travel anywhere in Ireland
Who can I go with?	Caving can take place if social distancing will be possible

Northern Ireland (From July 4th)

Can I go caving in Northern Ireland?	Yes – but subject to Government restrictions.
Where can I go?	The coronavirus regulations do not set limits for the distance that you may travel for any purpose. You should act responsibly and reasonably.
Who can I go with?	Caving can take place if social distancing will be possible

Disclaimer

The SUI return to sport procedure is contingent on Government and health service advice in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The contents of this document are based on the phased relaxation of lockdown conditions and should not be considered valid in the event of a change in governmental and health service policies.

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 cavers, 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.

The Speleological Union of Ireland has been preparing for a safe and responsible return to caving. In doing so we have considered a range of stakeholders in four broad categories:

1. Participants - both members and non-members;
2. Landowners and land-managers;
3. Rescue organisations;
4. Government departments and state agencies in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Part of this preparation has been producing specific advice to support cavers 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, local residents of caving areas and volunteers in the SUI Committee, as well as advice regarding hillwalking and climbing informed by Mountaineering Ireland best practices.

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 cavers should be aware of, in the presence of Covid-19. This advice builds on established good practice which is commonplace among cavers; checking weather forecasts, checking access arrangements, selecting caves that are appropriate for fitness, skill and experience, environmental awareness etc.

- This advice is aimed at all cavers;
- It is focused on the activities permitted in the mid-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 caving. 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.

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 the Cave Rescue team and Mountain rescue units;
- Avoid any additional loading on our health services;
- Improve the public perception of cavers.

Rescue and Emergency Services

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

- Choose less challenging caves, well within your capability;
- Be prepared to self-rescue;
- Choose caves in less remote locations.

Landowners and Rural Communities

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

- Please respect the wishes of landowners and rural communities – if possible seek landowner permission to visit their caves as previous arrangements may not apply;
- If possible, park in locations that are not close to houses;
- Plan your route to avoid homes and farm-buildings;
- Ensure that contact with gates/stiles is minimised and sanitise them after use.

Planning

When we return to caving, we need to be even more prudent in planning all aspects of our activity. Our choice of cave, 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 cave and region consider;

- How likely is it that I will encounter another group at this location?
- Do I have an alternative cave if people are already there when we arrive?
- Have I contacted the landowner (either directly or via the Conservation and Access officer) and clarified access is currently permitted?
- Is the cave well known to rescue teams, are there constrictions beyond which where rescue difficulty would become significantly harder?

Group Size

Gathering size restrictions in Ireland and Northern Ireland are now above most recommended group sizes for normal caving practice, however caves are humid environments with constricted spaces, so there is increased risk of spreading illness, the SUI recommend group sizes no larger than 6 people in caves where physical distancing can be maintained. However, vulnerable people are advised to go caving only with existing members of their household and avoid caves likely to have been recently visited by others.

When deciding a group size, consider;

- Stay within the group sizes advised by government.
- A digital attendance record should be filled in by the group prior to caving to ensure that contact tracing is possible.
- Going caving 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 Cave Rescue.

If you feel unwell you should not go caving, it is your responsibility to inform members of your group if you begin to feel unwell during a trip.

Travel

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

When considering your travel arrangements, consider;

- Are the people you are travelling with from the same household?
- If not, 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 when going to and from the Cave?
- 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 use to access some caves from. Other parking locations on private land may no longer be tolerated by the landowner, please seek landowner permission when finding a parking spot.

When parking you should consider;

- 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 and cleansing gates/stiles.
- Carry a facemask for times when physical distancing is not possible e.g. emergencies, unplanned proximity at pitches etc.
- Minimise sharing of equipment.
- Ensure you bring your own food and water, do not share bottles etc.
- After caving, quarantine your equipment for 72 hours, or wash it appropriately, before going out again with another person.

It should be noted that Speleological Union of Ireland members who go caving outside of club-organised activities are covered under SUI's BCA and FFS insurance policies depending on membership level.

Caving

Caving is an activity which presents challenges to social distancing. Some changes to our caving practise can make caving much safer. This advice should be considered in addition to your normal good practice. Apply common sense and use your experience and intuition as a caver to make sensible decisions.

When going caving consider;

- Are you familiar with your chosen cave?
- Is your chosen cave 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).
- It is important to maintain social distance within your group
- Be especially mindful of not gathering together around at climbs, pitches, or for photos,
- Be extra vigilant on maintaining distance when breathing hard in crawls or constricted spaces
- Try not to touch each other's gear (holding someone's bag while they climb over a gate/stile, passing equipment through constrictions)
- Due to the occasional physical contact that comes about when spotting climbs this should be carried out by members of your household where possible

SRT Practice

This advice will help plan for a safe and responsible return to SRT practice 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 to make sensible decisions.

For all SRT Practice please consider;

- If you usually do not wear a helmet, consider using one to reduce risk of injury
- Try not to touch each other's gear
- All participants should wash their hands before and after handling shared equipment
- After practice, quarantine your ropes and other equipment for 72 hours, or wash everything appropriately, before using equipment again
- Ensure groups are an appropriate size for government restrictions

When practicing outdoors you should consider;

- To facilitate physical distancing choose pitches with room at the bottom and top. If this is not possible you can change directions before reaching the top.
- When choosing a pitch, ensure your access route will minimise contact with others and that the route will not be in use by climbers etc.

When practising indoors you should;

- Follow all social distancing and safety restrictions as outlined by the climbing facility.

Expedition Caving

If you are planning an expedition in Ireland you should ensure that the scope of the expedition will minimise the risks of rescue and contact.

- Consider shifting focus towards surface work to identify potential sites for future expeditions
- Risk assess known caves planned to be visited (for re-survey, extension etc.) If there are known hazards do not include this in the expedition goals
- On discovery of new sites a careful assessment should be done to decide if it is safe to enter, if it is determined to be a higher-risk cave, exploration should be deferred to a future expedition.

The SUI welcomes applications for assistance with Irish based expeditions and will assist applicants with implementation of COVID-19 risk reduction measures. All expedition applications should include a full strategy and protocol for limiting risks regarding COVID-19. Guidelines for what this should cover can be provided on request.

International Travel

The SUI does not recommend cavers travel internationally unless absolutely essential, attendance of International expeditions is not advised currently.

The SUI advises international visitors that they must follow government guidelines on quarantine. For most visitors this currently means isolating for 14 days before going caving. We would ask that this restriction be observed when travelling to Ireland or Northern Ireland. Travel between Ireland and Northern Ireland does not require quarantine before going caving.

Advice for Clubs

Clubs should ensure that all club activities adhere to government guidelines on social distancing and protection. We request that all clubs appoint a COVID-19 officer to ensure guidelines are adhered to, training is available for COVID-19 officers, please contact the SUI COVID-19 Officer (Rory Smullen: suistudentliaison@gmail.com) to find out how to complete this training.

- All club events should have an electronic record of attendance in order to aid with contact tracing in the event of infection (See Appendix 1 for Template Form).
- All attendees should be notified of precautions that will be put in place on arrival and for duration of sessions and to ensure that they are fully aware of all symptoms of COVID-19
- Club COVID-19 Officers should be both aware of and have approved the activity taking place
- Ensure that relevant adjustments are made to risk assessments and safety plans to incorporate COVID-19 safety measures.
- Events should be clearly timetabled, with clear start and end times, to minimize contact time
- Ensure that First Aid kits been updated to include additional face masks, surgical gloves and sanitisers.

Advice for COVID-19 Officers

As the designated officer for COVID-19 it is your responsibility to ensure that all participants have completed an attendance form, to ensure that social distancing is possible at venues and that it is observed at training events. As COVID-19 officer you should be able to identify the symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, fever, high temperature, sore throat, runny nose, breathlessness or flu like symptoms) and respond to a suspected case appropriately.

It is not the sole responsibility of the COVID-19 officer to ensure proper hygiene is observed at events, all participants should ensure that proper hygiene is observed.

Contact Tracing

Contact tracing attendance forms should be retained by the COVID-19 Officer for at least 2 weeks. All participants should be made aware that if they are diagnosed with COVID-19 within 2 weeks of the event they should inform the COVID-19 officer (either directly or via medical contact tracing) so they can assist with contact tracing by providing attendance forms.

Dealing With a Suspected Case of COVID-19

In the event of someone developing the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 while at training, the designated COVID-19 officer should manage the situation, ensure participants observe social distancing. When deciding on a training venue, identify and mark an isolation area to be used to isolate the affected person from the rest of the group and a procedure to be followed to enable them to safely leave the premises. Request that the affected person inform the COVID-19 officer if

they are subsequently diagnosed with COVID-19 so they can so they can assist with contact tracing by providing attendance forms.

Resources

The following are links to useful information for cavers during Covid-19

SUI COVID-19 Officer:

Rory Smullen (suistudentliaison@gmail.com)

Keep up to date with Advice:

[Republic of Ireland Government](#)

[Northern Ireland Assembly](#)

[Speleological Union of Ireland](#)

[Sport Ireland](#)

[Sport Northern Ireland](#)

[Irish Cave Rescue Organisation](#)

[Mountain Rescue Ireland](#)

Education Resources:

[Sport Ireland Covid 19 Course](#)

[Sport NI Return to Sport FAQ](#)

Location Information:

[Sport Ireland Outdoors](#)

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

[National Parks and Wildlife Service](#)

Equipment cleaning and maintenance:

[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](#)

Excerpts from Government Recovery Plans

Republic of Ireland

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
	18 th May	8 th June	29 th June	20 th July
The distance you can leave your home for the purposes of exercise	5km	20km	You can extend travel to outside of your region	You can extend travel to outside of your region
Other social events			<p>Indoor gatherings of up to 50 people when conducted in line with public health advice are permissible.</p> <p>Outdoor gatherings of up to 200 people when conducted in line with public health advice are permissible.</p>	<p>Pubs, bars, and hotel bars may reopen</p> <p>Gatherings of up to 100 people indoors and 500 outdoors will be permissible</p>
Sport			<p>The following may reopen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Indoor Gyms and exercise facilities 	

Northern Ireland

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
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.

Appendix 1 – Example Attendance Sheet

Covid-19 Return to Sport Attendance Form

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in caving practice, you must complete this form before returning to training.

On review of the form, group leaders may contact you and ask you not to return to sport immediately.

N.B. Every question must be answered.

Club Information

Club Name:

Activity Planned:

Activity Location:

Activity Date:

Activity Time:

Participant Information

The information in this form may be used to contact you in the event of a COVID-19 infection being detected within the group, by completing this form you consent to your information being used in this way. If you have any questions please direct them to the COVID-19 officer of the organisation.

Name:		
Phone:	Email:	
Arrival Time:	Departure Time:	
In the Past 14 days have you:	Yes	No
Had any of the symptoms of COVID-19? (cough, fever, high temperature, sore throat, runny nose, breathlessness or flu like symptoms)		
Been diagnosed with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection		
Been in Contact with any confirmed/suspected cases of COVID-19?		
Have you been advised by a doctor to self-isolate at this time?		
Have you been advised by a doctor to cocoon at this time?		
Travelled Internationally?		

Individuals should avoid participating if they answer yes to any of the above questions