

How to return to organised group walks in a COVID-secure way

A guide for Ramblers Groups
and Walking for Health schemes



Dear All

Walking is all about freedom and the chance to explore the great outdoors. So, the COVID-19 lockdowns have been hard for all of us who love getting out into the fresh air.

That's why I'm so pleased activities have been able to slowly restart, including group walks of up to 30 people – from 30 July in England and Wales, and 24 August in Scotland.

This is really good news, but of course, the pandemic has meant changes for us all and there are some things you'll need to consider to make sure your walks are COVID-secure. This guide will take you through everything step-by-step.

At the moment, we know it can feel like the freedom walking brings has been replaced by rules and risk assessments, but please be assured, we're working hard to make this process as simple and straightforward as possible. We're carefully going through all three governments' guidelines to produce everything you need to resume your volunteer role when you feel ready.

We're as keen as you are to get back to focusing on the joy of walking!

Remember, we are always here to help, so if you have any questions about the instructions and guidance in here, contact our Operations Team on volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com.

Thank you for all the amazing, beautiful walks you share with our members. COVID-19 has forced us all to have to adapt but, during this time, I'm very grateful to be part of an organisation that has such passionate and committed volunteers

Thank you.

Best wishes
Rachael

Rachael Bayley
Director of operations and volunteering
volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com

Introduction

This guide is for those planning and leading organised group walks in the context of COVID-19. It covers the steps needed before, during and after the walk, to ensure that group walks are safe, welcoming and accessible to all.

We all know that group walks are a fantastic way to get outdoors, keep active and walk with others. They provide a safe way to explore the outdoors for thousands of people.

It was difficult for everyone when COVID-19 forced us to stop all activities in March 2020. Thankfully, we are now starting again in a phased way, and we're at a point where larger group walks can begin. However, we understand not every volunteer who leads walks will be ready to start straightaway, and that is absolutely fine.

There is no obligation to restart Ramblers and Walking for Health group walks until you are ready.

If government guidance changes in response to the COVID-19 alert level, we will update this guidance accordingly.

We are here to support volunteers who lead walks so if you have any questions, or need further information, please contact the Operations Team at the Ramblers:

volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com

This guide was last updated 24/08/2020 to cover group walks in Scotland in addition to England and Wales.

This guide, '**How to return to group walks in a COVID-secure way**' has been put together by the Ramblers, as the national body for walking, in consultation with and support from Ramblers volunteers, Walking for Health schemes and other walking organisations and partners.

It should be read in conjunction with the latest UK Government COVID-19 guidance – in particular, the guidance on 'organising outdoor sport and physical activity events' within the '[Guidance for the public on the phased return of outdoor sport and recreation in England](#),' which was provided by the UK Government on 9 July 2020 and updated on 17 July 2020, in Wales, '[Sport, recreation and leisure: guidance for a phased return](#)', which was updated on 24 July 2020, and in Scotland, the '[Scottish government route map update](#)' on 20 August 2020.

Summary: Key requirements

Below is a summary of the extra steps that must be carried out when planning and leading a group walk – to ensure it is both COVID-safe and enjoyable for all.

BEFORE THE WALK

- Check your Walk Leaders' personal circumstances – that they are ready to lead.
- For Ramblers Groups – make sure your Walk Leaders are recorded as a volunteer.
- Manage the risks by completing a risk assessment for each walk.
- Ensure group size is limited to 30 people – by providing information ahead of the walk and putting systems in place to manage numbers on the day, where appropriate.
- Provide info to walkers to manage expectations and personal safety.

DURING THE WALK

- Record who is attending the walk and keep this record for 21 days to support NHS contact tracing.
- As a Walk Leader – be prepared to manage incidents by carrying a face covering.
- As a group – follow the government guidelines on social contact & physical distancing.

AFTER THE WALK

- Continue to maintain physical distancing, including in any facilities where groups of people congregate.
- Remind anyone who develops symptoms within 48 hours of the walk to apply for a COVID-19 test, and to support NHS contact tracing if requested.

Detailed guidance for Walk Leaders and groups

Before the walk | Step 1 - Supporting your Walk Leaders

Remember that COVID-19 has affected everyone in different ways. Some volunteers may not be able to lead walks at this time, and no one should feel that they have to lead a walk.

Check your Walk Leaders' availability and personal circumstances.

Before volunteering, everyone should consider their personal circumstances and make the decision that's right for them.

Ask your Walk Leaders:

Do they (or someone else from their household) have COVID-19 symptoms?

If so, they should not lead a walk under any circumstances. Anyone with symptoms or in a household with someone with symptoms should self-isolate in accordance with government guidance.

Symptoms include a high temperature, a new continuous cough and the loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste. [Visit the NHS website](#) for more information.

Are they 'clinically vulnerable'?

Everyone over 70 and those with certain underlying health conditions are considered to be 'clinically vulnerable' to COVID-19.

If you and/or someone you live with is in this higher risk category, be especially careful and diligent about social distancing and hand hygiene. Volunteering may not be the right decision at this time. Check advice about those at higher risk in [England](#), [Wales](#) or [Scotland](#).

Do they want to volunteer, and do they feel safe and comfortable doing so?

Volunteering is a personal choice. There will never be any obligation or pressure to volunteer or take part if they don't want to or are not able to at this time.

Check your Walk Leaders' details are up to date

This includes making sure they are recorded as volunteers on the appropriate system.



For Ramblers groups: All volunteer roles are recorded on Assemble. To update or check your roles, please email us with your name, each of the groups you support, your role and membership number:

volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com

Before the walk | Step 2 – Understanding and managing the risks

Complete a risk assessment for each walk



Use our [risk assessment checklist](#) to help plan any steps needed to take to stay safe. This covers steps to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, as well as hazards found on a typical group walk.

You must complete a risk assessment for every walk you lead and keep a copy for 12 months after the date of the walk.

Recce your walk

We **strongly recommend** recceing the route as close to the date of the walk as possible, to make a note of hazards and plan any adjustments.

Remember to think about:

- Where you will stop for breaks and lunch, to enable physical distancing.
- Alternative routes you could take to avoid stiles or narrow footpaths.
- Escape routes if you need to cut the walk short.

Be flexible and plan for different types of walk

Walk Leaders should use their experience, together with the risk assessment and recce to consider:

Travel and transport

Follow best practice for travel to and from the walk.

Check government advice on travel and transport in [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#) for further information on public transport and car sharing.

Try to also consider the impact on car parks – existing parking problems are likely to be exacerbated due to current restrictions.

Location and route

Avoid busy and congested areas, or narrow footpaths, to make physical distancing easier and ensure you are aware of any local restrictions.

Length, pace and difficulty

Consider short walks, at an easy or leisurely pace to help people get back into walking.

Access to facilities

Check access to facilities such as car parks, toilets, cafes and pubs at the start and along the route. Many of these may be closed for some time.

Walk within your limits

Some people may be new to walking, not have walked for some time, or feel anxious about joining a group. We recommend avoiding riskier outings – such as strenuous walks, or visits to remote locations – to minimise the risk of an incident and the need to call on the emergency services.

Before the walk | Step 3 – Publicising your walk and limiting numbers

Advertise your walk publicly



We recommend adding details of your walk onto a public website and/or social media.



For Ramblers groups: You must advertise your walks publicly – use the Group Walks and Events Manager (GWEM) so the walk appears on the Ramblers website and app.

Write clear and informative walk descriptions

As well as the normal information you provide about the walk, you should include:

Information on limiting numbers up to 30 people.

You can lead walks of up to 30 people, from different households, but may decide on a lower limit depending on the availability of walk leaders, type of walk and location. Where this is the case, include clear information on how to book and/or what will happen if larger numbers attend.



For Ramblers Walking for Health schemes: we strongly recommend that every walk has at least two leaders, and no more than 20 walkers per walk leader.

Contact details

So that walkers can get in touch with questions. This may be the Walk Leader or another point person.

Provide further information about the restrictions.

Ideally include a link to our separate guidance for walkers, [Ramblers Restart: Taking part in a COVID-safe walks](#). It's a simple guide with information about physical distancing, hygiene, and any extra steps.

Be flexible

Plans may need to change at short notice, so think about different ways to organise your walks. For example:

- Use a **rolling programme** so walks can be added easily at any time. This is helpful as fewer walk leaders may be available, and there might be local restrictions.
- Think about organising **pop-up walks**, if walk leaders become available at short notice.

At this time, we do not recommend planning three- or six-month walk programmes, or distributing printed programmes.

During the walk | Step 4 – Leading a safe walk

Take steps to maintain physical distancing



You must keep up to date and follow the latest public health and government guidance in England, Wales and Scotland.

Find appropriate places to meet at the start and to rest, where you can spread out.



Where larger groups are expected, you must take steps to maintain physical distancing and ensure group safety. Take particular care at the start and end points, and pinch points such as gates and stiles.

We **strongly recommend** appointing a backmarker (and middle marker) for larger groups.

Group size should not exceed 30. You should draw on your experience as a walk leader, and existing good practice, to manage this limit on numbers.

Depending on the circumstances, this may include:

- Using a booking system, with a clear upper limit on numbers.
- Planning to split the group and stagger start times, if more than one walk leader is available. In this case, we **strongly recommend** leaving a time gap between groups of at least 30 minutes.
- Explaining the current restrictions at the start of the walk and why any additional walkers that have come along will not be able to participate.

Hold a welcome briefing

As well as your normal checks and introductions, hold a welcome briefing before you set off to remind everyone about physical distancing, hygiene measures and any hazards on the route.

It is everyone's responsibility to maintain physical distancing.

Keep records for NHS contact tracing



You must keep a record of everyone on the walk, in case this is needed for NHS contact tracing.

Explain to walkers that their details may be shared for this purpose, keep records securely, and delete or destroy them after **21 days**.



For Ramblers groups: the best way to do this is to take a register using the Ramblers app. Remember, in order to show on the app, your walk needs to be added to the Group Walks and Events Manager (GWEM). If you choose to take a paper register, use [our template](#).

If you are contacted about NHS contact tracing in relation to a walk please let us know as soon as possible by emailing volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com for the Ramblers or walkingforhealth@ramblers.org.uk for Walking for Health.

Take hand sanitiser and practise good hygiene



As a group, try to avoid touching gates and path furniture where possible. Do not share food and drink, or equipment such as walking poles or dog leads.

Carry a face mask in case of incidents



As a walk leader, you must carry a face covering in case of incidents where physical distancing is no longer possible.

In line with standard good practice you're also strongly encouraged to carry a first aid kit, a fully charged mobile phone, food, drink and a map (online or paper).

Walk responsibly

When other walkers are passing, remember to stand back and give way.

Know where you can and can't walk, be considerate to others and follow the [Countryside Code-Covid19](#) (England and Wales) or [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).

For more top tips and advice to help your walk run smoothly - download a copy of the [Ramblers Groups Walk Leader's Checklist](#) or [Walking for Health checklist](#).

After the walk | Step 5 – Thank, record and review

Thank everyone and remind them about NHS contact tracing hygiene

Make sure everyone is OK and thank them for joining the walk. If you plan to spend time together socially after the walk, remember to follow the latest government guidelines on social contact and physical distancing.

Remind walkers that if they develop symptoms after taking part in your group walk, they should apply for a COVID-19 test and support NHS contact tracing if requested.

Report any incidents or near misses



For Ramblers groups: you must complete an Incident Report Form within 10 days, and send it to us by email at incidents@ramblers.org.uk



For Ramblers Walking for Health schemes: you must complete an Accident Report Form or an Incident Report Form for non-physical incidents. Return to walkingforhealth@ramblers.org.uk within 10 days.

Remember to look after your records



As mentioned in Step 4, **you must keep a record of everyone on the walk, in case this is needed for NHS contact tracing.** Keep records securely and delete or destroy it after 21 days. Please also keep a record of your risk assessment for 12 months.

Share your feedback with us

If you decided you are ready to lead walks again, we are keen to hear how they go so we can continue sharing good ideas and good practice.

Please get in touch at volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com and let us know if you have any questions or advice for other walk leaders.

Useful links

- Ramblers website – [main coronavirus pages](#)
- [Ramblers Walking for Health website](#)
- Government guidelines on physical distancing – [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#)
- Government guidelines on travel and transport – [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#)
- NHS Contact Tracing – [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#)
- Mountain Training – [Hill Walking and Climbing Coronavirus update](#)
- [British Mountaineering Council website](#)
- [Countryside Code](#) (England & Wales)
- [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)