

Guidance for carrying out volunteering activities in Parks, Green Spaces, Rivers and Foreshores during current Covid-19 restrictions



1. Introduction

Keeping everyone who is involved in our outdoor activity healthy and safe is of the utmost importance to Thames21. These guidelines should be read and then used to help complete local COVID-19 risk assessments for all outdoor activities.

At this extremely challenging time Thames21 believes it is essential that, where possible, we continue supporting local people to safely access nature, exercise and work with others to care for their rivers and green spaces.

On February 22nd 2021, the Government set out the “Roadmap out of lockdown” that detailed a four-step roadmap for lifting restrictions throughout the year. These guidelines have been updated to reflect the changes that the Government Roadmap will have on the delivery of Thames21 volunteering activity.

One of the legally permitted reasons for people to leave home includes to “provide voluntary or charitable services, if you cannot reasonably do so from home.” Under this exemption **volunteering activity will restart on March 29th 2021.**

Thames21’s guidance must be read by anyone organising and delivering activity for on behalf of Thames21 including staff, Thames21 contractors, River Action Group (RAG) leaders and Event Support Team (EST) members. The information in this document must be used by event leaders to plan events and complete method statements and risk assessment for the activities. These guidelines must also be applied to site visits and site meetings. Local risks and hazards must be assessed and measure to reduce these risks must be adapted to meet local conditions.

1.1 Roadmap out of lockdown

Details of what you can and cannot do during the lockdown can be found here – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

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Below are the key dates set out in the Roadmap together with some selected changes to the restrictions.

Step 1

8 March – schools go back but the stay at home rule remains in place.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>

Last updated 8 March 2021

29 March – The rule of 6 returns for social gatherings, outdoor sports are allowed and the “stay at home” rule will end.

Step 2

Earliest 12 April. Non-essential retail and outdoor attractions open.

Step 3

Earliest 17 May. The limit for meeting people socially outdoors will rise to 30 people. Outdoor venues can hold events with 4000 people. Outdoor stadia can accept 10000 people.

Step 4

Earliest 21 June. Night clubs and theatres reopen. The government hopes to be in a position to remove all legal limits on social contact.

The Government has set four key tests that must be met before moving through each step of its Roadmap.

- **Test 1:** The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully.
- **Test 2:** Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths in those vaccinated.
- **Test 3:** Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS.
- **Test 4:** Our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.

2. Event and activity delivery guidelines**2.1 Group Size**

Volunteering activities can re-start from March 29th with a maximum limit of 15 participants at an event.

When Step 2 starts the group size limit will increase to 30 for general volunteering. Staff led activities can accommodate larger groups if necessary after the event is assessed and reviewed.

As the country moves onto Steps 3 and 4 there will be no size limit on events and Thames21 will review our event guidelines to assess whether any easing of Covid safe measures can be made.

When assessing the group size of an activity, Event organisers must consider:

- The task - Group size should be limited to the minimum that allows the activity to take place.
- The location - Social distancing must be easily maintained at the assembly point and work site.
- The group - How experienced is your group at working under COVID secure conditions?
- Welfare facilities – Where are the closest toilet? What hand washing facilities can you bring to site?
- Supervision – How will you ensure the participants are properly supervised and supported throughout?

2.2 Please read the guidance below carefully and ensure it is shared with all event participants:

You should only take part in the activity if:

- You are well
- No one in your household has had [coronavirus symptoms](#) or tested positive for coronavirus in the last 2 weeks
- Even if you have had both doses of the vaccine, you should continue to follow the governments shielding advice

You should not join a Thames21 activity if you are [extremely clinically vulnerable](#).

- If you live with someone who is over 70, clinically vulnerable, or extremely clinically vulnerable, consider their needs before volunteering or working outside your home.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Updated 25 February 2021

2.3 Basic principles for events

These principles were written to cover volunteering activity but should be applied to all Thames21 project activity taking place outside.

- Consider the whole start to finish volunteer experience when planning safe operating practices; this means all activities from the time of arrival on site to leaving, not just the volunteering activity.
- Volunteering activities should be simple straight-forward tasks such as litter picking or vegetation management.
- You must complete a risk assessment that considers the risks of running the event and identifies measures to minimise these risks. This guidance is supplementary to your risk assessment.
- You must also complete a separate risk assessment that details specific measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.
- It is important that all volunteering activities are focussed on completing a specific task and are not social gatherings.
- Ensure start and finish times of the event to avoid busy commuter times. Use of public transport should be discouraged. Ask participants to use other forms of transport if possible.

2.4 Adapting Expectations

Project officer will need to adjust their previous way of working and expectations of what is achievable whilst following these guidelines. Time will be needed for planning and carrying out cleaning at the beginning and end of the day. Likewise, there may be types of activities which have previously been easy to carry out which are too difficult to run whilst under COVID-19 secure guidelines. Limitation on numbers of participants, social distancing, not sharing tools or rotating tasks may mean certain activities cannot be carried out, or at a much slower pace.

2.3 Before the event

- Establish who is attending the event to ensure that the group size does not exceed your planned maximum including the event leader(s).
- Event leaders should assess whether they will need support from an EST or additional event leader during the activity to help supervise and ensure volunteers maintain a safe social distance throughout.
- Ask those planning to attend for their contact details and inform them that their contact details may be shared with NHS Test and Trace. They can choose to opt out, and if they do so their information should not be shared.
- Explain the planned task to all participants so they know what to expect and if they need to bring any personal items of equipment with them. Ask volunteers to bring and wear their own sturdy footwear if this is appropriate for the planned task.
- Remind volunteers to bring their own refreshments to the event as these cannot be provided.
- Ensure everyone in the groups has read and understood the guidance above in section 2.2.
- Do not publicly promote the precise meeting point of the event to avoid the risk of social gatherings.
- Volunteers must be reminded that it is the law to wear a face covering when travelling on public transport.
- Events may be shortened as volunteers will not be able to use public toilets during the event.

2.4 Bringing Equipment to the site

- Use only a private or Thames21 vehicles. If using a shared vehicle such as a Thames21 van wipe door handles, steering wheel and gear stick before and after use with antibacterial/disinfectant wipe.
- Maintain distance of 2m from other members of staff, contractors and ESTs. Use a facemask while loading and PPE (gloves). Don't share PPE with others. Use lifting aids where required rather than the help of a 2nd person.
- Wash hands for a least 20 seconds once loading is complete.
- Facemasks to be worn by staff.

2.5 During the event

- Event leaders and event support staff must be in possession of a mask or face covering during the event. It must be worn if they move closer than 2m to a volunteer to offer assistance.
- Record who is present at the event and remind all the volunteers of the need to maintain a social distance from people outside their household or support bubble of 2m throughout. Refer to government guidance on staying alert and safe social distancing above.
- If working in close proximity (aiming to maintain 2m distance), work side by side to reduce the risk of infection. Anyone repeatedly struggling to comply with social distancing will be asked to leave the event.
- It is advisable to plan events at quieter times to allow volunteers to travel on public transport when less congested and to enable everyone to maintain a safe distance from other people using public open spaces.
- The size of the group must be appropriate for the planned task and the site where it is taking place to ensure social distance can be maintained.
- Each volunteers should use the same piece(s) of equipment throughout and event and not swap equipment with other volunteers.
- Always use a litter picker if you have one
- Wash your hands before and after undertaking any activity with soap and warm water or hand sanitiser.
- You should have hand sanitiser with you, wash your hands frequently; ideally take a flask of hot water, soap and paper towels with you.
- Consider first aid needs - Check and replenished kits prior to the event ensuring several sets of surgical gloves and a face shield are present. Assess if volunteers are able to self-administer basic first aid. First aiders should use a face mask for use if they need to move within 2m of a casualty.
- Catch coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or your sleeve
- Avoid touching your face while working, even if you are wearing gloves.
- Bring and wear gloves (we can provide a new/washed pair if you haven't got your own) Volunteers can keep the gloves they have worn and wash them at home afterwards for reuse. Returned gloves will be collected separately from clean gloves for later washing.
- Remember that gates, locks, benches etc. are used by everyone, use hand sanitiser after touching surfaces.

2.6 After the event

- Ensure you have extra time at the end of the event to clean and store event equipment
- Volunteers should gather tools at agreed collection points ready for washing.

- Disinfect tools (with a suitable solution) after you finish using them, especially main contact areas, such as handles. Virkon, used in Thames21's biosecurity measures, is suitable to disinfect tools after use.
- If using a shared vehicle such as a Thames21 van; wipe door handles, steering wheel and gear stick before and after use with antibacterial/disinfectant wipe.
- Gloves and socks collected after the event will be machine washed as usual. Gloves and facemask must be worn by staff handling the washing. The bag used to transport washing should then be disposed of. The person dealing with the washing will wash their hands once their gloves have been put into the machine.

2.7 Recommended PPE and equipment List

- Fully charged mobile phone in case of emergencies.
- One set of gloves per person (wash after use)
- Suitable sturdy footwear. Assess the task and site. Is it safe for volunteers to use their own footwear?
- Hand sanitiser or a flask of hot water, soap and paper towels
- Anti-viral wipes Look for wipes that say Kills 99.9% bacteria and virus on the packaging
- High viz jacket for event leaders
- First Aid Kit that includes gloves and a mask s (EN 14683 for surgical masks suitable for first aid kits)

Thames21 does not insist on wearing face masks at events. There are some places where you must wear a face covering by law. In England, you must wear a face covering in a number of indoor settings including:

- community centres, youth centres and social clubs
- public transport (aeroplanes, trains, trams and buses)
- transport hubs (airports, rail and tram stations and terminals, maritime ports and terminals, bus and coach stations and terminals)
- shops and supermarkets (places which offer goods or services for retail sale or hire)
- shopping centres (malls and indoor markets)

A full list of indoor settings can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

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