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Suggested COVID-19-related Best Practices for Phased Return to Work for ACMG Members

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This document outlines the suggested best practices that should be employed by ACMG members of various certifications depending on the public health status at the time. In situations that seem grey to you, err on the side of caution.

Viral Transmission Principles

This section is included to help you understand how viruses are transmitted so that you can make judgements in undescribed or grey situations. In all cases, however, you must adhere to provincial guidelines even if the information below suggests you could be safe doing otherwise.

- You can become infected by being exposed to an infectious dose of viral particles through airborne droplets or from touching surfaces and then introducing the virus to your body nasally, orally or by touching mucosal membranes (eyes, nose, mouth)
- The infectious dose is a minimum density of viral particles that can be produced by breathing in, or touching mucosal membranes with, a small amount or short time exposure to high density particles, a large amount or long exposure to low density particles or anything in between.
- The best ways to protect yourself are by not exposing yourself to potential sources (keeping your distance, wearing protective garments, washing your hands far more regularly than you normally would and not touching your face).
- Minimizing the time you spend in proximity to a potential source is secondarily effective.
- The density of viral particles is lower in regions with large air volumes, such as the outdoors. While the risk of becoming infected outdoors (unless an infected person sneezes or coughs in your face) may be lower, it is wise to keep necessary exposure time very short.

Public Health Status

Provinces across Canada have adopted different stages or phases that describe the easing of restrictions as the COVID-19 pandemic situation improves over time. At this time, it is unclear what triggers movement from one stage to another and there is no guarantee that retrograde action will not occur should the outbreak take an unforeseen turn for the worse. The stage to which you should refer is the existing one for the province in which the work takes place. As we have from the onset, the ACMG mirrors the position of, and takes its cues from, the appropriate provincial health authorities.

Because of the uncertainty around the succeeding levels, the ACMG is only identifying best practices for stage 1 for sections where there will be evolution of those practices. For some sections, the practices will remain the same throughout each stage.

Best Practices

Pre-trip Communication with Guests – all levels; all guiding activities

- Inform guests that you are taking precautions to limit potential viral spread
- Describe those precautions depending on state of pandemic at the time
- Inform guests that the waiver has changed and that they need to read it over to ensure they understand and acknowledge those changes
- Require guests to sign a declaration of health and exposure. You should limit participation to those who can attest to being well, to not having been exposed to anyone who is sick, and to not having travelled outside their province within 14 days of the commencement of the trip.
- You may also choose to increase the stringency of your screening by limiting participation to lower risk demographics
- All payment should be digital
- Inform guests of any changes to your cancellation/refund policies
- If you have chosen to reduce overall level of risk on trip, describe why
- If guest chooses his/her own front-country accommodation, ask that he/she vet their viral mitigation procedures before booking
- Inform guests that agreement to come on the trip indicates agreement to abide by the mitigation procedures
- Inform guests that despite all precautions, one or more may still contract the virus

Pre-trip Communication with Contracted Guides on Trip – all levels; all guiding activities

- Inform other guides that you are taking precautions to limit potential viral spread and that their participation on the trip is dependent on their agreement to abide by these guidelines
- Describe those precautions depending on the state of the pandemic at the time
- Prior to issuing contract, determine whether guide is sick or recently has been exposed to someone who is sick – make your best call on whether to hire that person
- If you are choosing to reduce the overall level of risk on the trip, describe why and make it clear that increasing the level of risk in the field may not be done without consultation with you

Pre-trip Guides Meeting – all levels; all guiding activities

- Hold the meeting virtually or find a space where communication is easily done while respecting physical distancing guidelines
- Discuss in detail the pandemic-related mitigation you are instituting on the trip
- Review emergency protocols specific to viral mitigation – see First Aid and Emergency Response
- Review limits to risk exposure and requirement for consultation before increasing the limit

Transportation – all guiding activities

- Guests should arrive at the trailhead in their own vehicles or having been dropped off, and with an expectation to be picked up, by a resident of their household.

Group Hygiene – all guiding activities

- Have alcohol-based hand sanitizer on hand at all times
- Provide sanitizer to guests during meals or other rest stops; if guests have their own supply and it is as effective as yours, require them to use it during these times
- Require that guests do not engage in physical contact unless they are residents of the same household
- Require that guests do not pass around food or beverage to one another unless they are residents of the same household

Front Country Accommodation – all guiding activities

- Ensure that disinfection standards of accommodation meet your needs
- Ensure that alcohol-based hand sanitizer is available in each room
- Ensure that guests from different households have their own rooms
- Ensure that there is adequate space for physical distancing in common rooms

First Aid and Emergency Response – all levels; all guiding activities

- Carry additional masks and gloves in the first aid kit
- Use approved mask, gloves and eye protection for all first aid applications
- Dispose of mask and gloves after use
- If rescue is required, ensure victim is masked

Post-trip Communication with Guides – all levels; all guiding activities

- In feedback sessions or forms, ask guides whether the modified best practices significantly impaired their ability to deliver a safe and enjoyable experience for their guests
- Follow-up with guides who indicate that the experience was negatively impacted and discuss how to go forward
- Revise your plan as necessary

Post-trip Communication with Guests – all levels; all guiding activities

- In feedback sessions or forms, ask guests whether they felt adequately protected from viral infection and whether the modified best practices negatively impacted their experience

Equipment and PPE – all levels; all guiding activities where equipment is provided

- Before each trip ensure all company/guide owned soft goods (ropes, harnesses, slings, draws etc.) have either been isolated for a minimum of three days or have been washed in warm, soapy water
- Before each trip ensure all company/guide owned packs, tents, sleeping pads and footwear have either been isolated for a minimum of three days or have been wiped down with warm, soapy water
- Before each trip, ensure all company/guide owned sleeping bags and liners have been cleaned according to manufacturer's instructions
- Before each trip ensure all company/guide owned hard goods (biners, ice axes, crampons, pro, avalanche safety gear, skis, ski poles, hiking poles etc.) have either been isolated for a minimum of three

days or have been washed in warm, soapy water. For hard goods with no soft material or plastic, spraying with a dilute solution of bleach and water followed by adequately drying is an acceptable alternative.

- Ensure there is an adequate supply of appropriate masks for the length of trip and the number of participants, depending on the level of public health status

Foundational Decision-Making Principles

There are too many variations on a theme to be prescriptive about the activities you can do and the number of guests you can take. If you satisfy all the following principles, you should find yourself within acceptable safety limits:

- Maintain provincially recommended physical distancing or don appropriate PPE when you find yourself in a situation where you can't comply
- Everyone in the group should adhere to provincial travel recommendations
- Consider whether participants are members of the same household or social cohort when determining group sizes
- Scale back the seriousness of your objective enough to allow you to follow the guidelines and to reduce the possibility of the need for close contact first aid or external rescue
- Choose routes and/or activities that minimize transfer of gear
- Avoid crowded areas or popular routes
- If you need to make a rapid retreat due to an emergent situation, speed trumps the potential transmission of the virus. The immediate safety of your guests is priority one; preventing possible contagion is lower on the list.

Activity-Specific Best Practices

Participant Group Size Maximums – Note that these are suggested numbers that may be adjusted based on the principles above. The critical piece is that you are able to take appropriate measures to limit the potential of viral transmission.

In some cases, such as general mountaineering where the summits are wide and the transfer or use of the same equipment is limited, you may be able to increase the group size. In other situations, such as climbing at a popular crag, you may need to decrease your group size.

You have been well-trained to make principle-based decisions. Use that training to keep the public as safe as possible.

Top Roped Rock Climbing: 6

Multi-Pitch Rock Climbing: 2

Alpine Climbing: 2

General Mountaineering and Glacier Travel: 3

Non-technical Glacier Walking (roped or unroped): 6

Via Ferrata Guiding: 6

Day Hiking: 8

Backpacking: 6

Ski Touring: 8

Belays, Summits and other Tight Spots

Belays and summits are significant pinch points where guidelines for physical distancing may be challenged. Consider the following:

- Choose routes that allow for appropriate distancing on the belays and summits, or
- Wear proper masks and sanitize hands during the period when you will be in close contact
- Make transitions as quick as is safely possible
- When possible, bring enough pro to minimize gear transfer
- Reduce the amount of time you would normally spend on a summit or alternate people on the top

Other Parties on Rock or Narrow Alpine Routes

- Request that other parties maintain their distance from your group
- If second group must overtake yours, or vice versa, have you and your guests don proper masks during time of passage
- Pass or allow passing in places where the terrain allows for proper spacing

Rest Stops and Meals

- Maintain appropriate distancing at all rest stops and meal locations. Be vigilant as it is human nature to want to be closer to adventure-mates, especially if weather is inclement.
- Ensure that food and beverage is not passed from person to person except among members of the same household

Non-technical Mountaineering and Glacier Travel

Roped parties tend to be spatially separated under normal circumstances but gathering for rest stops or food usually brings people in closer contact. Determine a safe area for your guests to stand or sit such that physical distancing guidelines are maintained.

High Winds

Because wind can carry droplets, you can reduce the chances of viral spread during windy conditions by increasing your physical distancing or by donning masks.

Passing Others on Trails

Narrow trails present contact and distancing challenges for people trying to pass one another. Where possible, communicate with the approaching person or group and decide on who will move safely off the trail until the others have gone by. If it is unsafe to keep a two-meter spread, move as far as is safely possible and ensure the passing party moves by quickly and with no physical contact.

Backcountry Campsites and Cabins

- Ensure tents are occupied by one person or members of the same household during times of elevated risk of viral spread
- Ensure tents are pitched at least four meters apart – this will help prevent accidental contact
- Establish one cook and one cleanup person per meal
- Only the cook should serve food
- Add a few drops of bleach to rinse water; remain aware of potential toxic off-gassing when bleach combines with ammonia, isopropyl alcohol, vinegar and other cleaning agents
- For cabins where you are unsure of the disinfecting regimen, use disinfecting wipes or a bleach spray to clean critical surfaces
- Choose cabins that are not dorm style bunking. If you must use dorm style bunking (only when restrictions have significantly eased), maintain three times the usual distancing while sleeping to help prevent spread through uncovered sneezing and coughing from other sleepers.

Here is a link to the CDC site around cleaning and disinfection of community facilities and equipment.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

Instructional Settings

Best practices are similar to above with the following changes:

- Use online teaching where possible
- Book classrooms that are large enough to allow appropriate physical distancing
- Ensure classroom has been properly disinfected
- Field demonstrations must allow for appropriate distancing