

Walking Onwards

“Phase 2 Plus” has commenced; what does that mean for my walking group?

As Ireland opens up and outdoor public amenities and tourism sites such as parks, beaches, mountain walks, heritage and cultural sites are now open; you might be considering contacting your walking group members again and trying to reconnect with them in some way.

The updated Public Health advice is *“Stay local and protect yourself from infection by cocooning at home as much as possible”* however there are now options available for walking groups to reform; see below specific points that relate to travel and meeting up in groups outdoors:

2 Commenced 8th June



Community Health

- You may travel within your own county, or 20kms from your home if you are crossing county boundaries to visit local amenities such as parks etc that have reopened.
- Groups of up to 6 people who are not from the same household can meet outdoors.



Cultural, social and sport measures

- Groups of up to 15 people who are not from the same household can meet outdoors for organised activities such as fitness/sporting or other events.

Remember:

It is essential that everyone practices social distancing by adhering to the physical distancing requirement and avoiding all physical contact/sharing of equipment and practice strict hygiene.

You are advised to limit the number of people you meet with. The more contact you have; the greater you risk getting and spreading the virus. You are also asked to keep a daily log of people you meet for contact tracing purposes.

The details of this phased re-opening of our country are now available on www.gov.ie

Walking Groups:

As we all know; the benefits of walking when part of a walking group are numerous providing physical, mental and social benefits for members. However, in these uncertain times walking as part of your group has not been possible. Over the past few months, many of your group members may have been less active and more sedentary than normal. Therefore it is very important to start aiming to reach the National Physical Activity guidelines (30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity at least 5 days per week) in order to gain general health benefits and strengthening our immunities.

Hopefully walking group members have continued to walk at an individual level but this is often hard as the support and motivation that walking group members give have not been there.

Even though restrictions are being eased, some walking group members who have been “cocooning” may still be reluctant to meet up with the wider walking group. As the Walking Group leader, it would be great to reach out to them and help them to still be part of the group but perhaps in a different format:

Possible temporary group formations to consider:

1. Ask group members to register with you in advance so that the group won't exceed the 15 people limit

OR

2. If you have a large group; perhaps split it in two; walk on the same day on the same route yet at different times (each group should not exceed the 15 people limit and allow time between each group to prevent an overlap)

OR

3. Split your walking group in two however each group only meets on a fortnightly basis instead of a weekly basis; therefore everyone can stick to the same day, time and route as before however less frequently

OR

4. Divide your walking group into a number of smaller groups, each group could meet on the same day and time but on different walking routes (ensure there is a leader present with each group)

OR

5. Take suggestions from your group members on how they might like to see the group starting again.

Walking Challenges For Your Group

Whatever format you decide for your group, it is an anxious time for many so perhaps bring a bit of fun to the new group structure and look at setting some fun challenges for group members:

Nature – suggest a scavenger hunt; instead of looking for pre-hidden objects, task group members to look for certain plants, animals, and objects found in nature along their walking route. Another suggestion is to ask group members to share photos of scenery encountered along their walk. Also, if you have split your group into smaller groups; share photos of a particular point along the walking route and task the other group(s) with finding it when they are next on their walk!

Historical – ask group members to share interesting historical facts /stories about their walking routes/area.

Mindfulness – suggest to group members to do a walking meditation; advise them to adopt a slow pace to allow them to notice their breath and movement. When their walk starts, ask them to bring their attention to their body and tune into their breath by listening to the rhythm of their exhalations and inhalations; as they do, notice how their feet feel as they hit the ground.

Physical tasks:

Walking intervals:

This involves switching between slow, regular and fast-paced walking, for example;

- i) **Time:** Walk slowly for 3minutes, moderately for 2minutes, fast for 1 minute, then start again
- ii) **Landmarks:** Change your speed every time you hit a landmark, i.e. trees, ESB poles etc.
- iii) **Terrain:** Speed up on short hills & a moderate or slow pace between the inclines.

Beat the Clock – if some group members are walking the same route for a few weeks suggest that they time how long it takes for them to complete it. Then see if they can finish the next walk just a little bit faster. Seeing their progress over time can be motivating.

Strength exercises - if group members are comfortable suggest doing exercises that will strengthen their muscles and bones whilst on their walk. You could suggest curb step-ups, walking lunges, squats; plan to do one exercise every three to five minutes of their walk.

Some Practical Tips for Walking During These Times

It is not possible to eliminate all risk so everyone should adopt individual responsibility, therefore it is important to remember that walking over the next few weeks/months will be different to our previous walks. It is very easy to become complacent while out on a walk and connecting with others again. Below are a few points we should all consider while out walking as part of a group again:

- If possible start your walk from your own house - normally, walkers would be encouraged to use public transport or to offer lifts to other members when possible to get to their walk however, for the time being this is no longer recommended.
- Choose walking routes where you can achieve the recommended physical distancing requirement from other walkers. Avoid walking during busy times when crowds might form; perhaps consider early morning or late afternoon meet ups?
- When you meet up, remember that you should not shake hands with others.
- Avoid stopping to speak with other walkers, but if you do so, observe the physical distancing requirement.
- Each walker should bring their own bottle of hand sanitising gel and use before and after the walk. While out walking, our hands may come into contact with bollards, walls, benches etc. - clean your hands using the gel immediately after you touch any surface.
- Each walker should bring their own bottle of water for their use only and should not pass to other group members.
- If you are taking photos along the walk route use your own mobile. If you want a photo of yourself, take a selfie or ask a friend to take the photo using their mobile and they can send it to your mobile.
- Continue to practice good respiratory hygiene; cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue. Use the nearest waste bin to dispose of the tissue and use your hand sanitiser directly after.
- Please stay at home if you feel unwell or have any COVID-19 symptoms, and contact your GP (for symptoms and further information log onto www.hse.ie/coronavirus).

For more practical advice log onto www.theirelandwalkingguide.com. For further walking information log onto www.corksports.ie & www.getirelandwalking.ie

For further advice and support to reconnect with your walking group members contact:

**Caroline.Kelleher@hse.ie, Health Promotion Officer,
[Cork Kerry Community Healthcare](#)**

