

Covid-19 – the Route Map out of lockdown and the unjustified proposals to restrict travel and outdoor recreation

Description

My post last week on the Scottish Government's guidance on travel for Outdoor Recreation [\(see here\)](#) was re-posted, with my permission, on the UK Climbing and Hillwalking Forums and shared elsewhere. It received lots of comments and a fair amount of abuse. The abuse appears to have been founded on the view that anyone deciding not to follow the Scottish Government's advice and travel over five miles is selfish, irresponsible and risks spreading the virus. A week later, any lingering justification for those views is disappearing fast. This post argues that the Scottish Government needs to amend its route map out of lock-down to enable the road network to be opened up again as Dave Morris argued yesterday [\(see here\)](#).

The advice to “stay local” is political, not based on science

As others have noted, Nicola Sturgeon traveled to visit her parents in Ayrshire at the weekend [\(see here\)](#). It was an anomaly that under Phase 1 people were advised they could travel as far as they wanted to see family – taking account of the fact that most public toilets are closed and the advice was that people should not go into their family's house to go to the toilet – but not to go out for a walk in the countryside.

Far more important than what the politicians do or don't do, however, is the research. One of the comments on my post on the UK Hillwalking Forum was from Henning Wackerhage (not an acquaintance), an active climber, who also works in the school of medical science in Aberdeen. Henning has undertaken with others research on the health implications of Covid-19 for (formal) sport [\(see here\)](#). He cited (theoretical) research [\(see here\)](#) on 2m Physical Distancing which showed that potentially a longer distance might be required if you were running or cycling in someone's wake. As he commented, however, that research appears overbaked and:

“The reality is that there are no published reports of transmissions during cycling, walking or running and all my google skills failed to identify suspected transmissions during walking, running or cycling elsewhere on the internet. So the reality seems to be that SARS-CoV-2 mainly spreads indoors.”

As evidence for this Henning cited research from China [\(see here\)](#) which showed that only one of 318 outbreaks (3 or more cases) of Covid-19 studied originated outdoors. Its conclusion was that:

“All identified outbreaks of three or more cases occurred in an indoor environment, which confirms that sharing indoor space is a major SARS-CoV-2 infection risk.”

Now, as with any research, there are ifs and buts. Large events, like football matches and the Cheltenham races, where thousands crowded together outdoors and which were important for

spreading the virus in Europe, don't happen in the same way in China. But the conclusion should be very clear, that in terms of trying to prevent the spread of Covid-19 there is no justification for trying to limit where people go informally outdoors. As a precautionary measure, some popular places might need a bit of management, but there is no justification for trying to limit where people might travel on the road network as long as, when they get to their destination, they don't go indoors and mix with people from different households.

Phase 2 of the Scottish Government's route map out of lockdown

Unfortunately, as currently proposed, the Scottish Government's second phase out of lockdown ([see here](#)) fails to take account of the very different risks of transmitting Covid-19 indoors and outdoors. As a result the plans contain even more contradictions than Phase 1:

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As with previous phase but with the following changes:

Seeing family and friends

Able to meet with larger groups including family and friends **outside** with physical distancing

Meeting people from another household **indoors** with physical distancing and hygiene measures.

Getting around

Consistent with the reopening of workplaces set out in this phase, where home working is not possible businesses and organisations are encouraged to manage travel demand through staggered start times and flexible working patterns.

People are permitted to drive locally for leisure purposes.

Public transport operating increased services but capacity still significantly limited to allow for physical distancing. Travel at peak times discouraged as far as possible.

May be geographical differences depending on circumstances.

Extract from Phase 2 as proposed

The anomalies are created by the retention of the advice that people should only drive locally “for leisure purposes” (i.e 5 miles under the current guidance) while:

- Businesses where home working is not possible can re-open (“non-essential” “factories & warehouses, lab & research facilities factories etc”) i.e indoor businesses
- People can meet one other household indoors.

Under Phase 2, as proposed, people will advised they can move house – think workers crammed in removal lorry – go into small retail units, go into places of worship, attend indoor ceremonies in small

groups (all with physical distancing) BUT NOT drive over five miles for a walk in the countryside.

In terms of outdoor activities, under Phase 2 as proposed, people will be advised they can attend outdoor markets, sit outside a pub or restaurant and talk to their mates for hours, take their children to playgrounds or use “sports courts” BUT NOT drive over five miles for a walk in the countryside.

As a package of proposals, Phase 2 is incoherent and unjustifiable and it is no wonder more and more people are deciding not to follow the Scottish Government’s advice. In terms of civil liberties and human rights, the Scottish Government’s continued attempt to restrict outdoor recreation is completely disproportionate and any continued legal restrictions (such as shutting of public roads) should be open to legal challenge.

What needs to happen

The Scottish Government needs to adjust Phase 2 of its route map out of lockdown to make it clear that as long as people can travel safely (i.e while observing the Physical Distancing rules) they can travel as far as they like for the purposes of Outdoor Recreation and leisure.

Given the main risks of spreading Covid-19 are when people mix indoors, the Scottish Government could also allow people to leave their homes overnight so long as they are not mixing inside with others. That would enable self-catering accommodation, including caravan sites, to re-open helping the rural economy. It would also enable people to go camping and campervanning once again. As long as people are self-sufficient, none of those activities should pose any risk of spreading the virus.

These changes would remove the anomalies and inconsistencies from what is otherwise, in my view, a not unreasonable plan.

Category

1. Access rights

Tags

1. access rights
2. camping
3. Scottish Government
4. Tourism
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