



## **RISK ASSESSMENT - COVID-19**

This risk assessment is intended to be the basis on which Harlow Conservation Volunteers (HCV) can resume and continue practical conservation activities during the corona virus (SARS-COV-2) pandemic (which causes the disease COVID-19), now that the initial lockdown restrictions have been eased and replaced with social and physical distancing guidance and more recent legal restrictions from government. The measures to be taken are designed to ensure that HCV provides a “COVID-19 secure” workplace for volunteers.

This COVID-19 risk assessment is supplementary to all existing generic risk assessments for conservation work activity which are in general still valid. Where there is a conflict a local modification to the generic risk assessment will be needed. In some cases, if a satisfactory work-around cannot be found, the particular activity may not be possible to do for the time being.

See References at the end of this document for the guidance etc. taken into account when preparing this assessment.

## **Risks of volunteers being infectious or more vulnerable**

### **Prevalence of the infection in the population**

The most significant factor in the probability of the infection being passed on during a conservation task is whether any volunteers are infected when they attend, and that depends substantially of the current prevalence of disease in the population.

- The group committee and task leaders should be regularly monitoring government (Health Protection) Regulations and guidance, including any local restrictions, as to whether group activities can or should continue. The numbers of people allowed in gatherings would be important here.
- The committee and task leaders should also monitor indications published by the government of the prevalence of the infection nationally or locally and determine whether the risk is acceptable for planned activities to continue for the time being. A change in the government COVID-19 alert level would be a relevant factor.

### **Volunteers with known, suspected, or possible corona virus infection**

- Volunteers should be advised in communications before a task (website, task programme, task email) to follow government guidance on self-isolation (staying at home) in the case of possible or conformed corona virus infection
    - see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>
  - Any volunteer who has recently tested positive for the SARS-COV-2 corona virus (currently via the “swab” test) should be self-isolating in accordance with government guidance and should accordingly under no circumstances attend conservation tasks.
  - Any volunteer who has the symptoms of COVID-19, as recognised by the government, (see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>) (a new continuous cough, a high temperature, or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)) should self-isolate/stay-at-home as above and seek a test for the virus.
  - Any volunteer in the same household or household bubble as somebody who has tested positive for the virus or has the symptoms of COVID-19 should self-isolate/stay-at-home as above.
  - Any volunteer who has been contacted by NHS Test and Trace and asked to self-isolate/stay-at-home should similarly not attend conservation tasks.
- Volunteers, even if pre-booked on a task (see below), if they feel even slightly unwell before setting out should err on the side of caution and not attend that day’s task.

## Volunteers more vulnerable to COVID-19

Certain people are classified as clinically **extremely** vulnerable:

see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19> - they will have particular medical conditions and will know they are in this category.

- Volunteers should be advised in communications before a task (website, task programme, task email) as follows:
  - Anybody who is classed as clinically **extremely** vulnerable and in accordance with government guidance is currently shielding, should not be going out to work, and therefore should not join a conservation volunteer task.
  - Shielding is currently paused (from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020). However, such a person should still consider avoiding, especially in their own interests, attending conservation volunteer tasks.

Others, including all over 70s, are classified as clinically vulnerable:

see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-level-high> .

Those considered to be clinically vulnerable, but not extremely so, have no particular restrictions, but are advised to be “especially careful and be diligent about social distancing and hand hygiene”.

- Volunteers should be advised in communications before a task (website, task programme, task email) as follows:
  - Anybody who is considered to be clinically vulnerable may attend but should consider carefully whether to do so in the light of government guidance.

## Mitigation measures to reduce risk of transmission on tasks

Hopefully volunteers with the infection will be following guidance and be self isolating, but a known feature of the SARS-COV-2 corona virus is that people may be pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic. The mitigation measures set out below are to reduce risk of transmission in these situations and the number of transmissions at a given event.

### Volunteers developing symptoms while attending a task

- Any volunteer who develops the symptoms of COVID-19 while attending a conservation task must leave the task immediately and make their way home.
- Given that it is not necessarily possible to maintain even 1m physical distancing in a car, no other volunteer should give such a volunteer a lift.

### Measures to reduce the number of potential infections

The following are measures designed to reduce the number of potential infections for any give task and thus reduce the risk of a “super-spreading” event.

The general upper legal limit in the Health Protection Regulations on the number of persons in a gathering was reduced as of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to 6 (“the rule of six”). This brought the law into line with the existing limit in the government guidance for the public of 6 people from more than 2 different household. The adoption of tiered COVID alert levels and the move of Essex into the high (tier2) restrictions on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020 does not alter this for outdoor gatherings. The number can, however, be theoretically unlimited if “the gathering is reasonably necessary for work purposes, or for the provision of voluntary or charitable services” [Exception 3 in Schedule 1 Para 4 (4)(a)].

Since HCV is invariably working in public open spaces and given the general ambiguity as to the status of volunteers, HCV should err on the side of caution. COVID-19 secure workplace guidance also advocates limiting team numbers.

- The number of volunteers on an HCV task in a given location on the same day should be limited to 6 including the volunteer leader (5+1).

- It may be possible for a second group of up to 6 volunteers (5 + a second leader) to work independently at a nearby site or a separate part of the same site, provided there is only brief contact at the beginning and end of the day to collect/hand in tools.
- Limiting numbers in this way means that volunteers will need to book to attend ahead of the task day.
  - Booking options could be the whole day, morning only, or afternoon only.
- There may be some activities where volunteers need to work as a pair to maintain general safety: such pairing should be agreed at the start of the day and be kept to throughout the day.
- Activities needing more than 2 people to work closely together should be avoided.
  - Construction type tasks typically involve several volunteers working in close proximity. This rule means that many construction type tasks can only be carried out by at most two people in total. Such tasks, if undertaken at all, will need to be undertaken as extra tasks or alongside other activities provided for other volunteers attending on the same day. Construction projects will therefore only proceed slowly over many task days.

### Transmission via droplets and aerosols – mitigation measures

To reduce the probability of infection transmission directly via larger droplets (from coughs and sneezes) and aerosols (very small droplets from breathing and talking) the following mainly physical distancing (often called “social distancing”) measures should be followed. The risks for an outdoor activity are considerably less than for indoor one, e.g. in a confined space with limited ventilation.

- Tool/safety talks and task briefings should be kept to a minimum.
- Choose as quiet a location for meetings as possible to avoid the need for raised voices.
- Alternative on-line training material should be investigated and identified to help induct new volunteers.
- Participants should be reminded to sneeze or cough into their elbow and avoid touching their face.
- Wherever possible volunteers should work individually and spread out across the site so that they are at significantly further than 2m from the nearest volunteer, say 4-6m.
  - The 2m rule should be regarded as a minimum and volunteers should limit the time they spend at this distance.
- Where access to a work area has become restricted or blocked by growth of vegetation over time and this would lead to significant bunching of volunteers consideration should be given to further limiting the numbers of volunteers on an initial task to open up the access to the main work area.
- Only one person at a time is permitted in the HCV tool store at Parndon Wood.
- There should be no need for volunteers to routinely use face coverings on task – they could indeed be counterproductive in terms of the general health benefits of outdoor conservation work.
- If an individual volunteer wishes to wear a face covering or their own mask that is their personal choice. Note: face coverings generally protect other people rather than the wearer.
- HCV’s stock of industrial face masks must only be used to provide protection from various types of dust according to the work undertaken as normal.
- Where volunteers need to work occasionally as a pair for a short period of time, say up to 15min, to maintain general safety, e.g. moving a heavy log, they should try to keep to 2m distance if at all possible.
  - When working as a pair where it is not possible to keep to 2m distance then the absolute minimum is 1m. Volunteers should avoid facing each other. The duration of such operations should be kept to absolute minimum, say up to 30s.
  - Construction type tasks or woodworking at Parndon Wood may typically involve a pair of volunteers working closely on a repeated basis. Such work activities should be evaluated and where possible redesigned for mainly single working. If this is not possible the activity should be avoided altogether.

- Volunteers who are in the clinically vulnerable (and extremely) category should not be asked to work closely in a pair. Otherwise working closely in a pair is a matter of personal choice for each volunteer. Note: this may mean certain things cannot be done.
- Breaks for rest and refreshment are necessary during the course of the working. These will naturally be opportunities for socialising between volunteers. Minimum physical/social distancing of 2m must be maintained. There is probably little point in aiming for more as this would likely result in raised voices which would be counterproductive in terms of potential transmission of the virus. Prolonged breaks should be avoided.

### **Transmission via surfaces – mitigation measures**

The surface transmission route involves droplets carrying the virus alighting on a surface which is then touched by someone's hand who then goes on to touch their face. UV light in an outdoor environment can reduce considerably the time that a virus on a surface remains viable. On a practical conservation task the main issue is shared tools and equipment.

#### **Tools**

- If volunteers have their own tools they should be encouraged to bring them for their own use.
- A set of tools should be distributed to each volunteer for them to use exclusively during the day.
- To facilitate this the tools in sets should be numbered or colour coded for easy identification.
- Less common tools should preferably be assigned to a particular volunteer for the day.
- Hand tools should be wiped clean using bleach, disinfectant, or alcohol wipes at the start of the day and if passed to another volunteer during the day.
- For woodworking, e.g. at Parndon Wood, each volunteer must be provided with an individual complete set of marking tools – this should be in its own carry case/bag.
- Care must be taken if cleaning cordless or electric power tools to avoid cleaning fluids entering electrical parts. Cleaning could be limited to the carry case or bag.
- A volunteer can reduce the probability of being infected by wearing work gloves when handling a potentially contaminated tool. NB certain sharp edged wooden handled tools such as billhooks should not be used for general safety reasons with gloves.
  - Wearing work gloves does not prevent an infected person from contaminating a tool.
- Since tools will be left in the tool store between tasks for at least a week, usually two, which far exceeds the maximum period the virus might remain viable on a surface, no special cleaning measures are deemed necessary on storing the tools at the end of a task.

#### **Materials**

- Materials, e.g. timber for construction tasks, should be handled by as few people as possible. Cleaning is impractical. Normal work gloves should minimise direct hand contact.
- Fasteners, e.g. screws or nails for construction tasks, should be shaken out of a box in quantities required to avoid different people rummaging in the same box.

#### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (standard)**

- If volunteers have their own PPE and they prefer to use this they should bring it for their own use.
- To avoid sharing and hence cleaning the usual PPE of work gloves, hard hats, goggles, and earmuffs the group should purchase a supply and give a set to volunteers to use, take home, and bring on subsequent tasks. Sufficient spares should be carried to supply new volunteers, those that have forgotten, to provide replacements for worn out kit (mainly work gloves).
- Industrial masks, e.g. FFP2/3 for use when using cement, are similarly to be given to volunteers as necessary, but are to be regarded as throw away items.

#### **Handwashing**

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- HCV shall provide water (in bottle with tap) and soap (liquid) for handwashing. Soap and water is more effective than alcohol-based sanitisers and is not damaging to the skin. There should be a facility to wipe clean the tap between users.  
[A hands-free water supply (e.g. foot-operated) could be investigated.]
- Volunteers if they prefer can bring their own personal alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Mud and other soiling will need to be washed off before using hand sanitizer.
- Volunteers should be encouraged to wash/clean their hands at the start of each break.

### Refreshments

- HCV cannot provide the usual tea and coffee.
- Volunteers will need to bring their own refreshments, using flasks etc.
- Volunteers should bring their own water bottle.
- HCV shall have a supply of drinking water and a small supply of cups so that volunteers who have forgotten to bring any liquid refreshment can have a drink of water to avoid dehydration.
- Volunteers should not share any food or drink.

### Tool Shed at Parndon Wood

- To minimize the risk of transmitting the infection through touching electric switches, cupboard doors etc. only one person, designated for the day, should open/close and enter the shed on any particular day.

### First Aid

This is an area where further training may be in order.

- Volunteers should try to self-administer first aid as far as possible.
- No mouth-to-mouth should be attempted during CPR, only chest compressions.
- Additional medical PPE is recommended for first aiders: surgical gloves, face masks, eye protection, and aprons.

## Measures to assist COVID-19 Test, Trace, & Isolate

The test, trace, and isolate (TTI) regime for COVID-19 is currently being undertaken by NHS Test & Trace.

- Contact details for all volunteers must be obtained, by possible registration form, on booking, or as a last resort recorded by the task leader.
- A record of all attendees on the task must be made by the task leader, i.e. transferred to an electronic task record on or immediately after the task.
- Volunteers must be provided with contact details for HCV that they can pass to NHS Test & Trace should they need to provide their contacts.

## Relations with the general public

A “Staying COVID-19 Secure in 2020 notice” (3 July 2020) is downloadable in PDF at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-covid-19-secure-in-2020-notice> .

- This notice should be printed out and placed on the group’s A-board which is taken to each task.

In connection with the need to limit numbers and for volunteers to book on task:

- The detailed task programme with dates should not be published on the web-site, but only sent (emailed) out to volunteers and enquirers who have expressed an interest, along with instructions of how to book.

## References

The following documents have been taken into account when preparing this assessment:

### Coronavirus legislation

All the legislation can be found at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/coronavirus> .

The piece of legislation which is currently most relevant to HCV comes under secondary legislation:

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (High) (England) Regulations 2020 by Statutory Instrument 2020/1104 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1104> (last amended 24<sup>th</sup> October 2020).

### Government coronavirus general guidance for the public:

“Local COVID alert levels: what you need to know” (27 October 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-levels-what-you-need-to-know>

“Local COVID alert level: high” (27 October 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-level-high>

“Coronavirus (COVID-19): Social Distancing” (7 October 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>

“COVID-19: reducing transmission – what you can do to help” (temp withdrawn 14 October 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-reducing-transmission-what-you-can-do-to-help>

### Guidance on working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19):

Construction and other outdoor work (15 October 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work>

Heritage locations (28 September 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/heritage-locations>

### Other guidance:

TCV (The Conservation Volunteers), of which HCV is a Community Network member, have produced their TCV COVID-19 Secure Guidance:

<https://www.tcv.org.uk/working-safely-during-covid-19/> (version 9, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020).