

Maintaining the safety of the public and staff on coastal beaches during the COVID-19 pandemic

Guidance for local authorities, owners, managers and operators



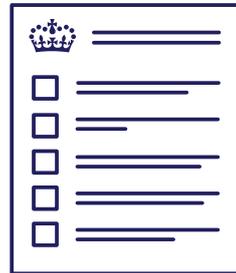
New advice: key steps to take

1



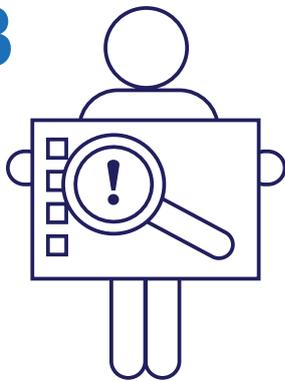
Consult and learn from peers

2



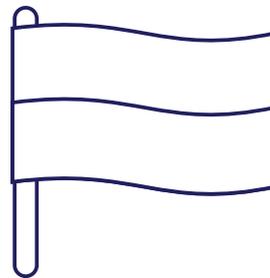
Check Government guidelines

3



Assess risks

4



Deploy updated measures

5



Test these measures

6



Communicate with visitors

7



Monitor, review and adapt

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Current state and challenges

Photo credit: David Walker, RoSPA

1 Introduction

This document is an updated version of **previous guidance** which reflects current COVID-19 developments in April 2021. It is relevant for beach managers and landowners, including councils and private organisations, and reflects the current experience of members of the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF), and other interested parties, who seek to reduce drowning and water-related harm in the UK.

The guidance and concepts within this document are also applicable and transferable to inland waters. For further information and guidance for inland waters, it is recommended that this document is read in conjunction with **Managing Safety at Inland Waters**. For coastal, it is recommended that this document is read in conjunction with **Managing Beach Safety**.

This document is concerned with the following aspects of beach safety:

- i. Mitigation of fatal and non-fatal drowning and related water safety harm
- ii. The challenges and practical considerations of seeking to maintain social distancing at the beach
- iii. Assisting duty holders with the obligation to update their risk assessments and to consult with staff on the implications.

This document is in two parts: a discussion on the current challenges and uncertainties regarding the best ways to reduce drowning and water-related harm in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic; and practical considerations for managers and communities.

Given the rapidly changing nature of the challenge posed by COVID-19, and changes in national advice, it is likely that this document will evolve rapidly. Readers are advised to check the publication URL for the latest edition and updates, and to assure themselves of the content we have linked to before decision making.

This document has been developed and issued by members of the National Water Safety Forum.

The principal authors and working group are listed at the end of this document. It is not UK Government advice.

This document is assured for the publication date only.

1.1 How to use this document

This document contains both commentary on the challenges and uncertainties, actions to consider and possible interventions.

Throughout the document, we have highlighted text as follows:

Actions to consider, such as using a checklist or risk assessment advice, are presented in a box with a green background.

Emerging projects or ideas that might impact positively are presented in a box with a grey background. These will be largely untested.

Key or critical uncertainties are highlighted in an amber box and typically include or are followed by a short section outlining the impact.

2 Principal objectives and considerations

Objective	Considerations
Seek to reduce the risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the beach risk factors during COVID-19 • Share the assessment with workers and contractors
Help visitors to keep themselves and others safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the status of the beach and services on offer • Clear water safety messaging, especially if lifeguards are not in attendance • Clear messaging to ensure people understand the need to maintain social distancing
Maintain social distancing wherever possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps to keep total visitor load on beaches to a manageable level • Reinforce social distancing on beaches • Maintain social distancing at 'pinch points', including access points to beaches and car parks • Maintain social distancing between the public and staff working at the beach
Provide a safe working environment for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that an updated risk assessment is conducted, and the necessary operating procedures are revised • Ensure that adequate steps, including physical measures, training and equipment, are in place • Ensure that a staff safety consultation has taken place
Keep the beach and associated facilities clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the beach and surrounding areas are kept clean from litter, including potential clinical waste (e.g. discarded face masks) • Ensure that toilets and other shared facilities have an enhanced level of cleaning, commensurate with the risk • Identify and manage possible touch or transmission points (e.g. handrails, handles, benches)

3 Government advice and pre-conditions

3.1 COVID-19 recovery strategy

At the time of writing, all home nations are on a COVID-19 recovery plan. Please see the national strategy for each specific nation:

- **England:** www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy
- **Wales:** gov.wales/leading-wales-out-coronavirus-pandemic
- **Scotland:** www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-strategic-framework-update-february-2021
- **Northern Ireland:** www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-recovery-plan

3.2 Advice for people with COVID-19 symptoms

The UK Government advice states: *“Do not leave home if you or someone you live with has any of the following: a high temperature; a new, continuous cough; a loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste.”*

The advice in full can be accessed at www.gov.uk/coronavirus. For more information on the symptoms of coronavirus, visit the nhs.uk website.¹

3.3 Workers in outdoor settings

Government occupational advice centres on each organisation completing a risk assessment with the aim of enabling a ‘COVID-19 secure’ workplace (read on gov.uk site). The advice outlines a hierarchy of measures to adopt.

The two key duties highlighted are to: (i) complete a risk assessment; (ii) consult with staff/volunteers on the implications (read on gov.uk site).

This guidance applies to England only. See guidance for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

3.4 Public visits to open spaces and public gatherings

UK Government advice is provided in section 6 of its guidance: Staying alert and safe, read on gov.uk site. (See guidance for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#)).

3.5 Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer public spaces – Urban centres and green spaces

This guidance is beyond the scope of beaches, but does provide a useful framework for identifying issues in public spaces where social distancing is required (read on www.gov.uk/guidance/safer-public-places-urban-centres-and-green-spaces-covid-19 site). See guidance for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

4 Manage the beach environment

4.1 Powers and decision authority

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 enables emergency responders and other specified duty holders in emergency situations to plan for and take steps to mitigate harm.² The Act has been used to clear and close sites, and provide warnings, in addition to the use of search and rescue (SAR) assets where there have been immediate threats to life, such as those posed by rock falls and flooding.

Under The Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 (England), authorities such as the Police have powers to disperse groups of people not maintaining social distancing. Powers are also provided to close premises; however, facilities including toilets have been allowed to remain open.^{3,4}

Public health is devolved within the UK. See the following links for nation-specific regulations: [Scotland](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#).

Local authorities have also been provided with extra powers for COVID-19 enforcement. See the following links for nation-specific regulations: [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#).

Workplace law and landowner duties are provided through a number of Acts. These request that the duty holder should consider the risk and take proportionate measures that offer staff and visitors some protection from everyday hazards at the beach.

If a scenario arises where a beach is considered or proved to be a significant transmission location, beyond the above-mentioned powers to disperse groups, it is not clear that the local community possesses or has clearly defined legal power to restrict or close the space. In this situation, the Director of Public Health, members of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Local Resilience Forum are the most likely local authority officers to shape such a decision.

Case study: Investment, multi-agency command centre and innovative technology are features of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council's readiness plan for 2021

The BCP Council area has long been a popular destination for visitors from across the UK and abroad, boasting a 15-mile stretch of seafront and sandy beaches, and with many attractions nearby, including the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, Corfe Castle, and Durdle Door on the Lulworth Estate.

Just this year Bournemouth has been voted the UK's best beach and is already ranked fifth in Europe, making the area a firm destination of choice for those looking for a staycation this year.

Last year, the number of beach visitors peaked on 25 June – around half a million people. With so many people crowding the beach area, despite the majority of them behaving responsibly, there were numerous cases of anti-social behaviour; huge amounts of rubbish were generated; and with limited access to public conveniences, many used the beach and surrounding area to dispose of human waste. Using the Civil Contingencies framework the authority moved to a 'stand-by' position in order to declare a major emergency. The clean-up the next day was colossal – an estimated 33 tonnes of rubbish was collected.

During late summer and autumn months the authority reviewed lessons from the summer, including discussion with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and NWSF beach group in order to be better placed for the 2021 season.

Key steps in the integrated plan include:

- Additional investment of £3.5million for the seasonal response plan
- A multi-agency command control centre (MACC) will be in operation until the end of September and will oversee the seasonal plan's day and evening operations, responding in real time to issues that arise when the resort experiences an increase in visitor numbers
- An additional 75 seafront staff have been recruited to welcome people, keep the beaches clean and safe, and provide a greater security presence.

In readiness for high traffic volumes, the council is also putting in place increased traffic management officers at key locations and car parks. Tow-away zones will be in operation to deal with illegal parking, and plans are in place to increase the parking enforcement team, with more than 70 civil enforcement officers ready to be deployed in the peak summer months.

The opening times of public toilets will be extended into the evenings at key sites, and additional cleansing operations will be in place. Extra security patrols, COVID marshals and additional Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) officers will be deployed on the ground in hot spot areas to provide a uniformed presence and deal with anti-social behaviour and enforcing COVID social distancing rules.

Developments to the BCP Beach Check app to include car parks so people can check how busy the beaches and car parks are before they arrive are also underway (see page 16 for details).



Photo credit: Lulworth CRT



Photo credit: RNLI

4.2 Provision of lifeguard cover

During 2020 the national level of beach lifeguarding cover was lower than in previous years.

In 2021 it is expected that lifeguard cover will return to more normal levels; however, there remains the potential for local impacts from the pandemic that may reduce the lifeguard cover available.

If lifeguard services are disrupted there are options to improve public awareness and to increase surveillance capacity at beaches with the principal aim of improving access to search and rescue (SAR) support. Some examples are provided in this document.

Notwithstanding the above:

Informing visitors of the status of lifeguarding at the beach is a central mitigation measure – especially if this was a previously lifeguarded site.

This is in addition to informing visitors about the current safety measures in place at their beach.

Practical steps in the beach environment

In this section, we outline the practical and planning steps to reduce the risk from drowning and water-related injury, and to assist in maintaining social distancing.



5 Seek to reduce the risk

5.1 What are the risks?

There are two principal risks we are concerned with:

- i Drowning and water-related harm in the coastal zone:** 2019 saw 208 fatalities and 2020 an increase to 215 along the coastal zone and beaches. Further, there have been over 30,000 annual SAR missions in coastal waters in the past two years.⁵

In 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic RNLI secured lifeguard cover on 177 beaches across the UK and Channel Islands with 1,141 active lifeguards at any one time. Lifeguards assisted over 3,000 members of the public, rescued over 2,000 people and saved 110 lives with a spike in fatalities in July and August when lockdown measures were relaxed and the public flocked to beaches.⁶

- ii Transmission of COVID-19: Public Health England states that:**

“The transmission of COVID-19 is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing, and through contact with contaminated surfaces.

...There is an increased risk of aerosol spread of infectious agents irrespective of the mode of transmission (contact, droplet, or airborne), and airborne precautions must be implemented when performing aerosol generating procedures (AGPs), including those carried out on suspected as well as confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Initial research has identified the presence of COVID-19 virus in the stools and conjunctival secretions of confirmed cases. All secretions (except sweat) and excretions, including diarrhoeal stools from patients with known or possible COVID-19, should be regarded as potentially infectious.”⁷

Uplift in demand for SAR services regionally, and reduced coverage of lifeguarded beaches, are the immediate aspects considered in this document. Beaches and resorts have been identified as drivers of transmission, however determining their significance is outside the competency and authority of NWSF members.

In the next section, we examine mitigations that seek to reduce the risks from drowning and water-related harm, and limit the transmission of COVID-19.

5.2 Consider and assess risk

Beach managers will have pre-existing risk assessments in place.

The HSE provides a range of tools to assess risk – see www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm

Government has published advice for working during the pandemic. See www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/updates

This guidance applies to England only. See guidance for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

The MCA has previously published advice for beach and coastal managers to help improve the management of beach safety risks.

The advice includes case studies and practical risk assessment approaches aligned with the ‘plan, do, check, act’ cycle – see www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-beach-safety

The following (amended) flowchart⁸ provides a useful structure for assessing COVID-19 factors when reviewing public and beach spaces:

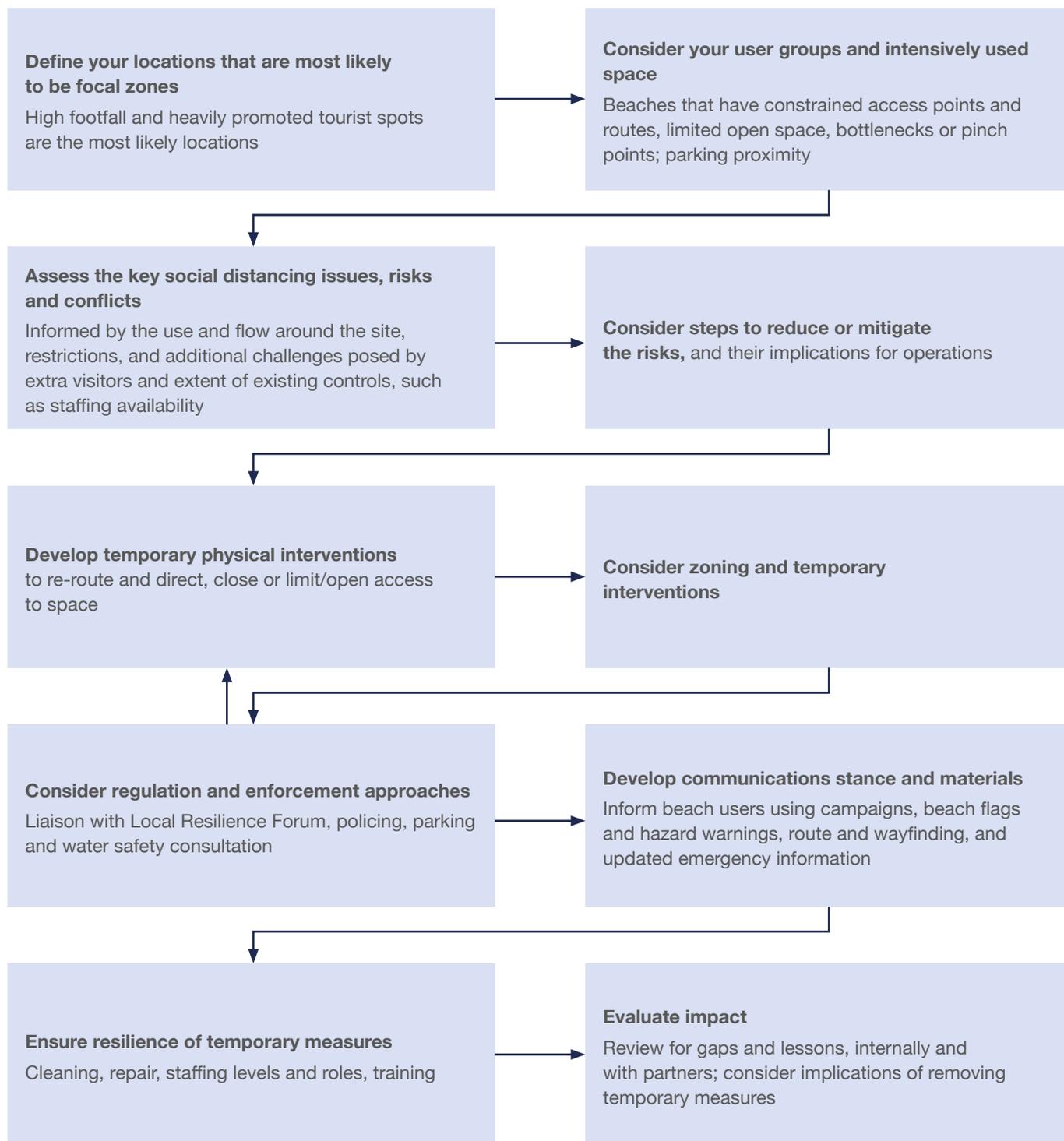


Figure 1: Social distancing: factors to consider for beaches (adapted from UK Government public space guidance)

5.3 Consult and train staff/volunteers on the new arrangements

At an early stage, discussing the findings and implications with affected staff is advised. Subsequent training may be required, both in the core safety elements and the additional demands, such as communication and customer skills.

6 Help visitors to keep themselves and others safe

6.1 Improve awareness of the risks

Campaigns with the objectives of raising awareness and behaviour change may help influence safer choices at the beach. The current challenge for beach managers is to ensure that two sets of messages are delivered – those for social distancing and those for water safety advice.

It is recommended that beach managers utilise the following campaign messages.

Coastal advice for spring and summer 2021:

- Follow safety advice and protect your family
- Beach lifeguards can't be everywhere this summer
- If in trouble, FLOAT to live
- In an emergency, call 999 and ask for the Coastguard

Example campaigns:



Supporting and amplifying key national messages with minimal variance from the original will help with recall.

For more information and support, visit www.rnli.org and www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk

6.2 Provide clear information about the safety provisions and expected norms for the beach

Upon arrival in the community, at car parks, transport hubs and the main access routes, there must be clear information for visitors, as a minimum, on the following topics:

- Information about the status of the beach and services on offer
- Clear water safety messaging, especially if lifeguards are not in attendance
- Clear messaging to ensure people understand the need to maintain social distancing

The following are examples of messages in use during March to May 2020:



Additional information at a key entrance (slipway) highlighting 'no lifeguards'.

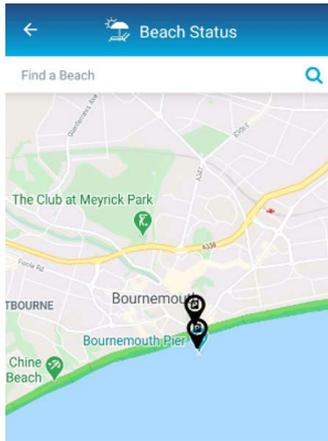
Further key behaviours to adopt and actions to take: 'Do not enter the water' and 'Call 999 and ask for the coastguard'.⁹



Social media collateral from MCA, reinforcing key local hazards and action to take: Call 999 Coastguard.



Bi-lingual signage informing that the site is closed. Photo taken during initial lockdown phase.¹⁰



BCP Beach Check app¹¹



Short animated message from Dorset Council targeting day-trippers.¹²

This was framed by the corporate stance: “Thinking of visiting Dorset now? Please think twice”.¹³

6.3 Improve surveillance capacity

The deployment of beach wardens – typically, these are skilled and knowledgeable volunteers who can help with swift identification of people in distress, raise the alarm, and help coordinate SAR support. They can provide a community-led resource for locations where lifeguards are not available.

They are distinct from lifeguards; as such, there is no direction, provision or expectation for them to undertake a contact rescue, or to provide first aid services to the public.



Photo credit: Newquay Surf Lifesaving Club (@NewquaySLSC)Twitter¹⁴

If deploying beach wardens:

The standard information about 'No lifeguard' provision must remain. A further aspect to communicate is that beach wardens are not lifeguards. There should be no ambiguity on these points for the public.



Example 'No lifeguards' sign
Image credit: RNLI/MorgansConsult

There are a number of programmes that can be used to help develop local capacity. These are listed in 'Further information'.

7 Maintain social distancing wherever possible

7.1 Manage demand

The possible positive implication for beach safety during summer 2021 is that adjusting demand may help direct visitors toward a more appropriate or safer location.

7.1.1 Transport to the beach

Steps to reduce visitor load on beaches through public transport to beaches: limiting car park spaces; closing car parks. Careful consideration should be given as to the undesirable impacts of such measures.

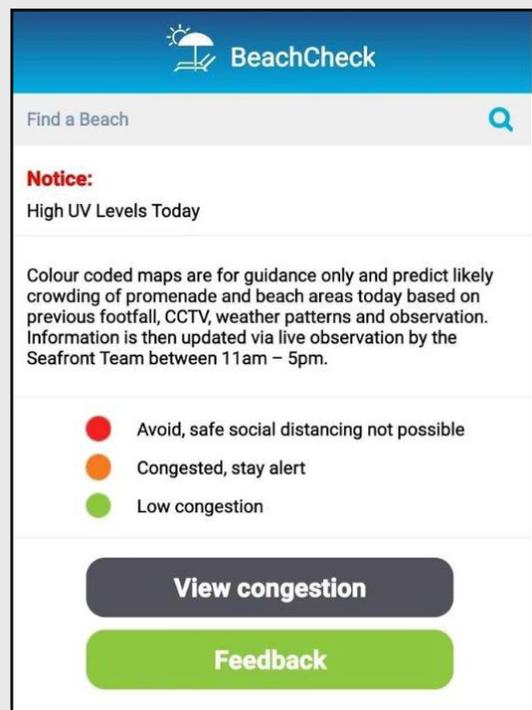
A number of local authorities in the UK and abroad are exploring measures to affect the inbound flow of visitors by repurposing near-time information on the capacity of car parks and, in turn, beaches.

Bournemouth Beach Check App: Case study

Established in 2019, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council is a unitary authority in the county of Dorset, southwest England. A popular area for visitors, the summer season often draws in large numbers to its beaches. With the easing of lockdown in early summer of 2020, visitors flocked to the beaches in unprecedented numbers.

In response, BCP launched a new app in July 2020 which allows visitors to check the congestion levels of their beaches in order to remain safe. The app uses a live traffic system to help visitors avoid busy hotspots during the warm summer weather.

The app also allows users to provide feedback. Information on the lifeguard status of beaches, byelaws and toilets is also included.



7.1.2 Manage car park entry and exit points

Creating or adjusting entry flows, with specific entry and exit points, can help change behavioural norms and users' expectations of the site.

Examples of signage from March to May 2020:



Photo credit: Edinburgh Live¹⁵



Photo credit: Your Local Paper¹⁶

7.1.3 Manage foot routes and reallocate space

An amendment to the General Permitted Development Order (2015) enables emergency development by local authorities and health service bodies, and can be used by local authorities to make adjustments to structures.

The following tactics have been utilised:

- Provide signage to encourage pedestrians to wait and to allow others to pass at entryways or along footpaths.
- Ensure arrangements are in place, such as designated areas, signage and barriers or screens, to separate staff from beach visitors.
- Widen footways to accommodate distancing between pedestrians, including through the use of temporary barriers, changes to parking bays, and cycle lanes.
- Reduce unnecessary obstacles, e.g. planters, and add markings/tape on seating to maintain social distancing.

Security considerations and the impacts of measures on people with disabilities and other groups need to be kept under consideration and may call for a balanced approach.

7.1.4 Consider 'loading' calculations

The Institute of Place Management (IPM) indicates that the use of static distancing and dynamic space calculations are more appropriate to enable true distances in public spaces.¹⁷

8 Provide a safe working environment for staff/volunteers

Social distancing between staff working on and around the beach needs to be managed. If it is not possible to maintain a 2m separation, implement other mitigation measures, such as screens or set pairings.

The HSE provides advice for workplaces – see www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19



Photo credit: RNLI Jersey Lifeguards

9 Keep the beach and associated facilities clean

In addition to the public health and hygiene rationale for toilets, the availability of public toilet provision makes a direct contribution towards reducing the drowning risk for visitors.

As far as is reasonably practicable, toilets should be provided. The provision of toilets should be considered as a (human factor) measure to reduce the risk of drowning.

To limit transmission of the virus:

- increase regular cleaning of toilets and shared facilities
- ensure staff/volunteers have access to hand washing facilities
- carry out regular removal of litter
- increase the provision of litter bins
- increase the number of toilet facilities
- identify and clean touch points.

Access guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings based in [England, Wales, and Northern Ireland](#) and in [Scotland](#).

10 Further information

Accessed 23 April 2021 unless otherwise stated.

Government advice

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance

England: www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Wales: gov.wales/coronavirus

Scotland: www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance

Northern Ireland: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-documents

Coronavirus: guidance for employees, employers and businesses

England: www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19

Wales: gov.wales/keep-wales-safe-work-html

Scotland: www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-returning-to-work/pages/employers

Northern Ireland: www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/coronavirus-guide-making-workplaces-safer-and-priority-sector-list

Coronavirus: cleaning of non-healthcare settings

England, Wales and Northern Ireland: www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings

Scotland: www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings

Guidance for UKSAR responders – COVID-19

www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-interim-guidance-for-first-responders/interim-guidance-for-first-responders-and-others-in-close-contact-with-symptomatic-people-with-potential-2019-ncov

Managing beach safety: a guide from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency

www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-beach-safety

COVID-19 recovery strategies

England: www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy

Wales: gov.wales/leading-wales-out-coronavirus-pandemic

Scotland: www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-strategic-framework-update-february-2021

Northern Ireland: www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-recovery-plan

Protect yourself and others

England: www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19

Wales: gov.wales/protect-yourself-others-coronavirus

Scotland: www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19

Northern Ireland: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-safe-outside-your-home

Staying safe outside your home: face coverings

England: 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

Wales: gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-public

Scotland: www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-public-use-of-face-coverings

Northern Ireland: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-face-coverings

Sector advice and information

COVID-19: Guidance for managing beaches, the countryside and coastal areas

www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-beaches-the-countryside-and-coastal-areas/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-beaches-the-countryside-and-coastal-areas

Guidance for beach operators managing lifeguards during COVID-19

www.rlss.org.uk/guidance-for-beach-operators-managing-lifeguards-during-covid-19

About this document

Version control

This is a controlled document that will update rapidly. Amendments and authorisation will be acknowledged on this page.

Version	Status	Details	By	Authorised	Date
1.0	Working draft – not published	Internal draft for working group	PD, DJW, KP	-	May 2020
2.0	Late draft for CG				
3.0	Authorised	Initial public copy	DJW, KP, PD, NWSF CG + WG		June 2020
4.0	Authorised	Updated public copy	DJW, CM, KP, PD, CN, NWSF CG		April 2021
4.1	Authorised	Final proofing	DJW, CM, KP, PD, CN, NWSF CG		June 2021

Change	Section(s)	Summary
1.0	All	Structure and stance of document. Scope of considerations.
2.0		Structure and stance of document. Scope of considerations.
3.0	All	Feedback from working group, typos and imagery changes.
4.0	All	Updates based on NWSF survey
4.1	All	Final proofing

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With thanks to the following members of the National Water Safety Forum Coastal Group: BCP Council, ESFRS, MCA, NCI, MPA, RLSS UK, RoSPA, RNLI.

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- 4 www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/350/schedule/2/made
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