

Recreational Caving COVID 19 Risk Mitigation Plan

for NSW Caving Clubs and Societies

The development of the plan by the NSW Speleological Council Executive (Council Executive) is a mandatory requirement for the NSW Government, through the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to consider rescinding the current suspension on recreational on lands administered under the National Parks and Wildlife Act (1974)

The Council Executive has developed the plan in consultation with the NPWS Landforms and Rehabilitation Unit and individual speleological groups/clubs. The Council Executive is fully and singularly responsibility for the implementation of appropriate COVID-19 risk mitigation procedures and the health and safety of its members in line with the information provided on the NSW Health Department website:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/public-health-orders.aspx>.

**Minimum standard conditions**

• The Australian Speleological Federation (ASF) Adventure Activities Insurance Policy cover all ASF members against any claims for public liability, including damage to third parties arising from the activity carried out under this permit.

See <https://www.caves.org.au/administration/insurance>

o SUSS and NUCC are members of the NSW Speleological Council but covered by their University insurance policies.

• Speleological groups/clubs will pro-actively implement COVID-19 19 risk mitigation measures consistent with current NSW Health and NPWS public health and safety guidelines:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>

and the latest COVID-19 case locations and alerts in NSW (refer below links).

*Speleological clubs, trip leaders and individual caving participants should familiarise themselves with the information available through these links in planning and undertaking recreational caving activities.*

• <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/case-locations-and-alerts.aspx>

• <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/public-health-orders.aspx>

• <https://covid19nearme.com.au/state/nsw>

• Speleological groups/clubs will maintain an electronic record of the names and contact details of individual trip participants for a minimum period of 28 days from the concluding date of the relevant caving activity. Records must be provided as soon as possible, but within 4 hours, upon request of NSW Health, 7 days a week.

o see copy of attached Spreadsheet

• Speleological groups/clubs will undertake a comprehensive ‘COVID-19 Risk Assessment’ of the planned recreational caving trip prior to its commencement. The COVID-19 Risk Assessment will be in addition to the general risk assessment required for all recreational caving activities and must be included in all recreational caving permit applications submitted to the NPWS for consideration.

• For recreational caving a maximum of 6 participants per individual caving trip will apply. For cave diving, a maximum of 8 participants per individual caving trip will apply.

• On arrival at the proposed recreational caving site, trip participants will have their temperature checked by the nominated trip leader to ensure that it falls within approved NSW Health COVID-19 safety parameters. The temperature of individual trip participants at the time of checking must be clearly identified in the relevant cave trip report, as noted on the spreadsheet.

• Trip participants must a wear a mask to approved NSW Health standards, or other endorsed NSW Government standards, on entering and while traversing a cave or section of cave. This requirement is mandatory for all trip participants due to the impracticality of applying NSW Health guidelines for social distancing to all recreational caving activities.

• Trip participants will provide their written assurance to relevant speleological groups/clubs that they have not visited an identified COVID-19 hotspot (refer to latest COVID-19 case locations and alerts in NSW <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/case-locations-and-alerts.aspx>) in the last 14 days, as noted in the electronic spreadsheet.

• Proposed trip participants who display the physical symptoms of COVID-19 will not be permitted to participate in the proposed recreational caving trip or related activities. See Appendix 1.

• Trip participants will carry personal hand sanitizer at all times and apply this prior to entering the cave and at planned intervals while traversing the cave where it does not affect the cave environment.

• Trip participants will wear gloves on entering and while traversing a cave or section of cave. The type of gloves worn by trip participants shall, wherever possible, align with NSW Health guidelines and be under the direction of the Council Executive which will consider their practical utility in the context of recreational caving.

• Trip participants will refrain from shouting or talking excessively in caves to reduce the risk of airborne COVID-19 transmission.

• Trip leaders will incorporate COVID-19 safety aspects into pre-activity briefings and will ensure that a copy of the NSW Speleological Council’s Recreational Caving COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Plan is made available to all trip participants and nominated representatives of the NPWS.

• Wherever practicable, COVID-19 social distancing measures will be enforced providing this does not constitute a safety risk in other ways, for example, when providing a belay to a climbing or abseiling caver.

• Trip participants must not share personal equipment such as helmets, overalls, lights, abseiling apparatus etc. If the sharing of personal equipment is required for safety reasons trip participants will be fully responsible for ensuring that equipment is cleaned/sanitised in accordance with NSW Health Guidelines prior to it being shared.

• Trip participants from different household groups must not share accommodation venues, facilities (wherever practicable) or provisions (e.g. bedding, eating utensils) <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/public-health-orders.aspx#gathering>

• Trip leaders and individual trip participants must diligently apply the minimum conditions for recreational caving, as identified in this guide, and any other conditions which, through their on-going review of NSW Public Health and NPWS COVID-19 guidelines, or other NSW or Australian Government approved document, reduce the risk of virus transmission.

Appendix 1 - Signs and symptoms of COVID-19

The signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection include, but not limited to, the following:

• A fever (i.e. ≥37.5°C), cough, sore throat, shortness of breath (difficulty breathing), runny nose loss of smell and loss of taste.

• Fatigue, acute blocked nose (congestion), muscle pain, joint pain, headache, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting and loss of appetite. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia with severe acute respiratory distress.

• Unexplained chest pain and conjunctivitis have also been reported as symptoms of COVID-19.

If these symptoms present in the absence of any clinical focus of infection or alternate explanation of illness, they may indicate infection with COVID-19.

NSW Health recommends that anyone with any of the listed symptoms be tested for COVID-19.