

Best practice for tree planting events with social distancing

Last updated: 17/09/2020

Disclaimer: this best practice guidance is solely the view of the author and its contributors. The approach of each contributing organisation may change or vary slightly. This is guidance only, produced by organisations who are experienced in volunteer management and tree planting events, not public health professionals. It is not medical advice. Volunteers and organisations use this guidance at their own risk and continue to be responsible for their own health and safety. The authors do not accept any liability for any loss incurred as a result of relying on its contents.

The below is subject to change as government advice changes, and organisations and individuals must ensure they adhere to the most up-to-date guidance available. Government guidance may vary between countries and regions.

This guidance was created with input and support from the following partners:



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General event guidelines

- Everyone should be required to wear masks/face coverings unless they are unable to (e.g. those with asthma, autism, anxiety disorders, hearing impairment).
- Everyone should keep a minimum of 1m distance between one another, and 2m where possible
- Provide alcohol hand gel and wipes at entry, exit and during activities, and where possible full hand washing facilities including single-use hand towels
- Ensure volunteers work side-by-side rather than face-to-face
- Use tape, cones, one-way movement etc to facilitate social distancing
- When planning your event, consider adding additional staff whose primary role it is to manage the event's social distancing protocol. It is easy for people to forget the guidelines when they become absorbed in the task of planting
- Portion out tools and resources, e.g. trees, spades, tree ties, before volunteers arrive to minimise queues and passing of items hand-to-hand
- Observe maximum group size as advised by government – currently, gathering must be a maximum of 6 persons – five volunteers and one coordinator
- Have staggered volunteering times where volunteers can attend in shorter shifts. This will make it possible to have a higher number of participants, but with a lower infection risk than with one large group
- If possible, signs should be used to remind people to adhere to social distancing
- Have your guidelines for social distancing during the event available before and during the day – e.g. on sign-up desk, in poster form, in briefing, joining email etc – signpost the message as frequently and clearly as possible either nationally or locally
- Have contingency preparations to cancel events at very short notice if things change. Events should only take place outside. No indoors events should be held until further government guidance permits

Event sign up/registration

- The event sign-up process should include taking the names and contact numbers of volunteers, explaining that these may have to be shared with public health officials as part of contact tracing. These will be held for 21 days after the event
- Optionally, included in the sign-up process, event organisers can provide a tick-box for volunteers to confirm they have read the social distancing rules and they take responsibility for their attendance

Joining instructions to volunteers

Ahead of each event, volunteers should be made aware of the following points (via e-mail, on event booking form, website, etc):

- What measures will be in place to protect staff and volunteers
- Volunteers should bring their own refreshments, masks, gloves and other light equipment if they own them
- No one should attend if unwell, especially if experiencing even mild COVID symptoms (temperature, persistent dry cough, loss of or change in taste or smell)
- In joining details, invite people to advise you on any special needs or requirements they may have
- Refreshments will not be available, so volunteers should plan accordingly
- The event could be cancelled last minute due to changing COVID restrictions
- Whether or not toilets will be available

Toilet facilities

Due to the risk level and disinfection protocol needed to keep facilities safe for use, it's very likely toilet facilities will not be provided at many tree planting events, therefore event times (or participant 'shifts') should be shorter to facilitate this.

If toilets are provided, an effective disinfection protocol must be the top priority. If a contractor will be cleaning the toilets, obtain information about their cleaning and disinfection protocol ahead of the event, eg via risk assessment. Consider compost toilets with hand wipes and/or hands-free, foot-pedal, hand washing. Provision of toilets should be included in the risk assessment document – including cleaning protocol, and the provision of hand gel, single-use hand towels etc.

For events with no toilet facilities, an accessible off-site toilet (within a short walk or 5-minute drive of site) should be identified for use by staff only, who may be on-site for several hours.

Food and drink

Organisers should not provide drinks, cups, cutlery or anything for sharing, but can provide individually wrapped snacks and drinks.

Volunteers should be advised to bring their own refreshments, sufficient to keep them fuelled throughout the event, especially water – to minimise need for single-use individually wrapped items.

Equipment and disinfection

Ideally, hand to hand exchange of items such as tools will be kept to an absolute minimum. Organisations should consider whether they have enough of all the required resources to meet the potential need on the day, as traditionally volunteers will share tools.

Volunteers should be provided equipment at the beginning of the session (gloves, spades, mallets etc) and, where possible, keep the items for the duration of their stay. Materials such as tree ties, tubes, etc should be prepared and parcelled out at the beginning of each session, by event staff wearing gloves, to minimise exchange of items by hand.

When volunteers finish with their equipment, it should be disinfected with alcohol cleaning wipes and left to air dry completely before another volunteer uses it. Gloves, hi-viz and any other clothing should be washed between sessions at 60 degrees with antiviral detergent.

Organisers should have extra stocks of alcohol wipes, disposable gloves, etc for any volunteers who have not brought their own or if equipment fails in use (not to be advertised!).

Emotional support for volunteer managers/event coordinators

Enforcing social distancing and running events during this time may be more stressful than usual and staff may feel anxiety related to this. Volunteer managers should receive training and support on how to encourage social distancing in a clear and friendly way. Volunteers should be made aware that responsibility for social distancing and safe practice sits with them and any attempts to break social distancing for themselves or others may result in them being asked to leave the event.

Debrief sessions should take place after events to assess what worked/did not work/find out any further support needed for volunteer managers.

Managing concerns of volunteers

Volunteers should be made aware that organisations/volunteers will do all they can to reduce the risk of infection. However, it is not possible to eliminate completely the risk of infection, even if it is possible to make the risk extremely low. Therefore, volunteers who for health or mental health reasons think they may find attending an event challenging or are higher risk, are encouraged to use their best judgement about attending. That decision remains with the volunteer.

High-risk groups

According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) those believed to be at higher risk of coronavirus include those who:

- are older people
- have a high body mass index (BMI)
- have health conditions such as diabetes
- are from some Black, Asian or minority ethnicity (BAME) backgrounds

Members from these groups should be made aware that they are higher risk and attend at their own risk.

Others may be shielding vulnerable family members and should take this into consideration when deciding whether to attend.

We encourage organisations to consider how to include high-risk groups safely, who may be experiencing isolation and loneliness due to lockdown and social distancing. We encourage organisations to consider which activities they can safely take part in.

Attendance of children and pets

Parents bring children at their own risk, as they will be responsible for ensuring that they socially distance and use hand gel and wipes regularly. If children do attend, circles/safe

work areas can be created on the ground using tape/rope etc to encourage social distancing and make it easier for young people to understand.

Since the role of pets in transmitting coronavirus is not yet understood (a house cat has recently been confirmed as having COVID-19), family pets should not be brought to events at this time. Assistance dogs are welcome, but other volunteers should not distract or engage with assistance dogs as is the usual courtesy.

Risk assessments

Organisations should apply the following principles to their risk assessments:

- measures must be reasonable/practical/enforceable
- individuals must ultimately take personal responsibility
- no-one - volunteers or staff - should feel pressure to attend events if they are not comfortable doing so

Organisations should follow HSE guidance for coronavirus risk assessments, bearing in mind that legal responsibilities towards volunteers will differ to those to paid employees so some considerations may not apply.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm>

Events where charity representatives will not be present

Organisations should provide this guidance to volunteers and event coordinators to help them plan a safe event. If there are reports that social distancing is not being observed at events supported, funded or associated with charities, it may prevent further events from taking place.

Volunteer organisers should complete a risk assessment based on HSE coronavirus guidance: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/assets/docs/risk-assessment.pdf>

Transport

Volunteers should observe all government guidance on using public transport safely. They should drive, cycle or walk where possible. If volunteers share lifts, passengers from other households should sit in the back, wear masks and keep windows open, and should not sit directly next to individuals from other households or social bubbles.

First aid

Only first aiders who are in general good health and not a vulnerable group at this time should be designated as a first aider. Where possible, first aiders should take their temperature before attending and first aiding at an event.

First aiders should keep distance where possible, wear a face covering (combined with a face visor where possible) and sterile gloves, plus clean hands thoroughly if first aid is needed. The person being treated should also wear a mask if possible. Several sets of sterile gloves should be kept in each first aid kit. In the event of cardiac arrest, perform compression-only CPR and use a public-access defibrillator where possible. The patient should have their mouth covered with a cloth or towel to reduce infection risk, at the same time, care should be taken not to obstruct the airways. This guidance has been provided by the [HSE](#) and [Resuscitation Council UK](#).

Accessibility

Wearing a face covering is not possible for all – exceptions should be allowed for this and should be included in event coordinators' training. Event organisers should be aware of any such cases ahead of the event through the sign-up process.

Event leaders and other staff might consider using visors instead of masks as face coverings. This makes it easier for those who are harder of hearing to lip read, and therefore see and hear instructions clearly.

A written laminated version of the social distancing rules for the event and the risk assessment should be made available for the hard of hearing.

Organisers should keep in mind that English will not be the first language for many volunteers, and use simple, accessible English in their communications to volunteers.

Clearing up

- Risk assessments should include consideration of how to safely pack down the event
- For clear-up, volunteers/event coordinators should use a fresh set of sterile gloves and a mask
- All equipment should be wiped down with alcohol wipes
- Clothing to be laundered should be put into bags, sealed with gaffer tape and labelled
- Distinct roles and responsibilities should be assigned ahead of the event to minimise passing of items from hand to hand and confusion over what items have and have not been disinfected
- Bags/containers should be clearly labelled, especially those containing 'contaminated' items

Delivery and handling of trees from nurseries

Event organisers should discuss the safe working practice guidelines the nurseries have in place for the delivery of items from the nursery ahead of the day, ensuring that they are adequate.

Ahead of the event, organisers should request an up-to-the-day risk assessment from the nursery, signed on the day by the nursery staff undertaking the delivery.

Items should be removed from packaging ahead of volunteers' arrival.

Aftercare

Event coordinators should support any volunteers who will be doing tree aftercare in later months to observe social distancing on future events