

VNPA BWAG COVID Safe Protocols

Revised 28 January 2021 – these protocols may be superseded in the future.

These protocols are to be implemented as a priority but in conjunction with all required risk assessments. The following process applies to assessing activities against these protocols and approval for walks and activities to go ahead:

1. Leader to complete **BWAG COVID Safe Protocols Leader Checklist** (part 2 of online form found at www.vnpa.org.au/leader-resources)
2. Leader to submit completed **Leader Checklist** to BWAG Program Coordinator along with **BWAG Activity Submission** (part 1 of online form above)
3. Activity approved by BWAG Program Coordinator
4. In lead up to activity Leader to:
 - a. Provide **Required Information** to participants in Trip Notes (available at www.vnpa.org.au/leader-resources)
 - b. Have all participants fill out **Participant Checklist** either online (www.vnpa.org.au/participant-checklist) or on paper (print version available at www.vnpa.org.au/leader-resources) prior to the activity (on the day)
5. On activity, leader to monitor situation on the activity and uphold social distancing and hygiene guidelines below.
6. After the activity any completed **Participant Checklists** not yet submitted to be emailed to activities@vnpa.org.au by the end of the day of the activity.

Before organising and undertaking a volunteer VNPA bushwalk or activity, the following must be considered:

Duty of Care

Duty of care is a legal duty that requires activity leaders to take all reasonable measures to prevent harm to any participants under their care.

Duty of care could be described as “What a reasonably prudent walk leader would do to take reasonable care to avoid exposing fellow walkers (having regard to their age, experience, skill and other individual matters) to unreasonable risks of injury or loss.”

All volunteers must not be asked to perform activities that are clearly beyond their experience and ability. This applies to leaders, assistant leaders, activity volunteers and participants.

The VNPA, BWAG and/or Activity Leaders may be legally liable for negligence in relation to an activity. To prevent this situation, Activity Leaders should act with all reasonable care

Occupational Health and Safety

Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) involves a team approach. Everyone associated with the VNPA has a duty of care that requires each person to be capable and responsible for their own health and safety, as well as for the health and safety of others. So far as is practicable, the VNPA is committed to providing and maintaining an environment that is safe and effectively eliminates or minimises the risks to the health and safety of staff, members, volunteers, contractors and visitors.

1. Does activity adhere to government regulations?

*Default to state regulations: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>

Review current statements from government agencies to check if areas are open:

<https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/get-into-nature/safety-in-nature/covid-19-update>

<https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/visiting-state-forests/forest-and-road-closures>

2. Public and Private event definitions

VNPA bushwalking activities are defined as “A private event” under the current Victorian Chief Health Officer’s Directions.

A private event is a gathering limited to family and friends, **and members or guests of an organisation or club**, within the relevant venue or gathering limits and where the event is **not open to the general public**, and where food, beverages and entertainment are provided without the organisers seeking compensation

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/public-events-information-for-organisers>

Given that participants on BWAG activities will be either members or guests of the organisation and the activities are only promoted to a discrete group and we are not providing food, beverages or entertainment we meet the above definition.

If BWAG activities were to be classified as public events, they are considered low risk activities using the public event self-assessment tool. <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/public-event-self-assessment-tool>

Regardless of whether BWAG activities are defined as a public or private event and the following protocols and our COVID Safe Plan (of which these protocols are a part) meet with the requirements for both a private event and for a low risk, Tier 3 public event with an existing COVID Safe Plan (these protocols are a part of VNPA’s COVID Safe Plan).

3. Participant suitability

- Participants are encouraged to inform the trip Leader or VNPA on vnpa@vnpa.org.au if they have any concerns for the safety of themselves or others.
- Participants must not have travelled internationally in the past 14 days or live with someone who has.
- Participants must not take part if they are known to have been in contact in the past 14 days with any person who is a confirmed COVID-19 case.
- Participants must be well and not show any symptoms of COVID-19 including fever, sore throat, dry cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell.
- Participants must not take part if any member of their immediate household has any symptoms of COVID-19 including fever, sore throat, dry cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell.
- Participants must not take part in field work if they are awaiting test results for COVID-19 or any member of their household is awaiting test results for COVID-19.
- Participants demonstrate they are willing to make efforts to abide by all required social distancing and hygiene precautions.
- If areas are remote, or rough terrain, participants must be adequately fit to undertake the task so they are able to complete the task without requiring support from others.

4. Group sizes

VNPA BWAG activities must be kept to less than 15 people.

While outdoor group activities in Victoria can take place with larger numbers of people, BWAG activities are being kept to under 15 people during this ‘COVID-normal/COVID Safe’ period’. Leaders will be encouraged to keep activities smaller than usual because in addition to the usual people management and leadership required on a walk/activity, it will likely also be necessary to ensure these guidelines are adhered to and participants will likely all have different boundaries and worries around COVID safe behaviour. For example some people who attend may be quite anxious about going out with a group and others may feel that the rules are ‘over the top’ and not necessary.

Generally BWAG activities are small in number. Keeping numbers slightly smaller than usual will help support leaders with the more challenging task of leading groups at this time and help groups maintain social distancing requirements.

5. Social distancing

- Participants to avoid physical contact with any other person or anything they have touched unless from the same household.
- Participants to maintain a physical distance of 1.5 metre minimum unless from the same household.
- Participants to be self-contained and bring their own hand sanitiser, drink bottle and food.
- Leaders are not to organise carpooling for participants. Carpooling actively discouraged.

6. Carpooling

- Carpooling cannot be organised for participants.
- Carpooling to be actively discouraged unless people are from the same household.

7. Camping and overnight night activities

- BWAG will not be offering camping or overnight activities at this time.

8. Hygiene (including mask wearing)

- Participants not to share personal equipment (drink bottle, clothing, food, sunglasses etc.)
- Participants not to share equipment (pen, clipboard, GPS, cameras etc.)
- Participants to hand sanitise regularly.
- Participants to cough or sneeze into elbow and clean with sanitiser
- Participants to be self-contained and bring their own hand sanitiser, drink bottle and food.
- Leader to provide hand sanitiser in case participants forget.
- Participants to bring a face mask and use if they wish or if required by law or Leader. Follow all Victorian Government guidelines: www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19 This includes carrying a face mask and wearing a mask while in shopping centres. Masks are still recommended in situations where maintaining a distance of 1.5 metres is impossible.
- Face masks should also be worn at the beginning of activities during pre-activity discussions. Face masks should be well fitted and cover the nose and mouth.

9. Documentation

- All VNPA face to face contact for walks and activities must document the people, time and location spent together and any other relevant information.
- All participants are required to complete a **Participant Checklist** before participating in walk/activity. These checklists will be emailed to a central email address that is available at the VNPA office and to activity leaders and the BWAG Program Coordinator.

10. In the event of a positive COVID-19 case

- If a person has a positive COVID-19 test result within 14 days of participation within a VNPA BWAG walk or activity, VNPA will be required to contact DHHS, provide all protocols and risk assessments and follow Safe Work Australia guidelines and any directions given by DHHS.
<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/office/covid-19-your-workplace>
- If a person on a walk or activity comes down with COVID-19 like symptoms (fever, dry cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, gastrointestinal symptoms, headache) the person will need to be isolated away from the group, e.g. keep 3-4m behind and the group will need to return to vehicles so the person can get home. All participants on the walk will also need to head home and be encouraged to keep an eye out for symptoms.