

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) impact on boating and visiting our waterways

Questions and answers

Questions and answers apply to the period associated with the roadmap to ease restrictions in England commencing on 8 March 2021.

For internal use to respond to external customer queries

Please note, while the information is considered to be true and correct at the date of publication, changes in the guidance after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of the information. Please always refer to GOV.UK for the latest guidance.

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03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
03459 88 11 88

Question 1 Are waterways open and can boaters use the waterways?

Answer

Our waterways are open but please refer to the [roadmap for navigation on Environment Agency waterways](#) below to see how we are taking a stepped approach to how you can use them, following Government advice and in line with other UK navigation authorities.

For all steps of the roadmap, those who live aboard their boats can continue to travel to access essential services and facilities.

From 8 March some of the rules on what you can and cannot do have changed. Please refer to the [roadmap table](#) for further details.

The 'Stay at Home' restriction continues, but people can now leave home for recreation as well as exercise outdoors - with their own household, support or childcare bubble, or with one person from another household.

From 29 March as part of the first step, 'Stay at Home' restrictions will be lifted, however government guidance instructs you to continue to stay local where possible and minimise travel throughout the first 3 steps of the roadmap. "Staying in your local area means stay in the village, town, or part of the city where you live." ([Guidance – National Lockdown: Stay at Home, updated 22 Feb 2021.](#))

This means that during the first step from 29 March, people should avoid travelling further than is reasonably necessary on board their boat or to take part in their waterway activity.

All references to permitted activities below assume that boats allow for social distancing rules to be adhered to. COVID-Secure guidance will also remain in place up to and including Step 3 (subject to a proposed review of social distancing rules ahead of Step 4).

Boats and businesses must not cater for groups larger than the legal limits at each step unless meeting the conditions for a permitted organised gathering. These will be reintroduced at Step 2 for outdoor gatherings and Step 3 for indoor gatherings.

Those who live aboard their boats can continue to travel to access essential services and facilities.

We advise customers who are navigating to access essential services or facilities to follow social distancing and hand-hygiene guidelines.

From 12 April, 17 May and 21 June there are further changes to the rules on what you can and cannot do. Please refer to the [roadmap table](#) for further details.

Road map for navigation on Environment Agency waterways

	Step 1		Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
	8 March STAY LOCAL (stay in the village, town or part of the city where you live)	29 March MINIMISE TRAVEL	No earlier than 12 April MINIMISE TRAVEL	No earlier than 17 May MINIMISE TRAVEL	No earlier than 21 June
Private boats	Private boating on an open boat permitted for recreation for a single household or bubble - subject to the requirements to stay local and minimise time spent away from home	Private boating on an enclosed boat permitted for recreation for a single household or bubble or 6 people / 2 households per boat if vessel is open - provided social distancing can be maintained between people / different households No overnight stays	Same as Step 1 plus restriction on overnight stays lifted for single households or bubble only	Same as Step 2 but now with 6 people / 2 households on enclosed boats On open boats, up to legal capacity (but no more than 30 allowed)	No restrictions (subject to review)
Watersports activity	Private watersports permitted for exercise - 2 people / 1 household. Stay local and minimise time spent away from home	Formal club activity can restart, outdoor venues. Private groups of 6 people / 2 households	Same as Step 1	Private groups of up to 30 outdoors	No restrictions (subject to review)
Self-drive day hire	Permitted for recreation on an open boat for a single household or bubble - subject to the requirements to stay local and minimise time spent away from home	Single household or bubble in an enclosed boat or 6 people / 2 households per boat if vessel is open - provided social distancing can be maintained between people / different households	Same as Step 1	No restrictions (other than the usual capacity of the boat) in an open boat or 6 people / 2 households per boat in an enclosed boat	No restrictions (subject to review)
Self-drive holiday hire	Not permitted	Not permitted	Single household / bubble per boat	6 people / 2 households per boat	No restrictions (subject to review)
Skipped passenger / charter boats	Not permitted	Government advises it is up to the discretion of each operator / skipper to determine whether their boat may operate compliantly under each step. Operators / skippers should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social contact rules governing indoor and outdoor gathering which apply at each step. Your ability to ensure appropriate social distancing between individuals/households at each step. Nb. the skipper does not count towards Rule of 6 or 2 household limits			No restrictions (subject to review)
Hotel boats	Not permitted	Not permitted	Single household / bubble per booking (must be self-contained accommodation with no sharing of facilities)	6 people / 2 households per booking	No restrictions (subject to review)
Fixed trading boats	Takeaway only	Takeaway only	Outdoor table service, 6 people / 2 households per booking	Up to 30 people per booking outdoors, 6 people / 2 households per booking indoors	No restrictions (subject to review)

Our service at this time

We will continue to support this national effort through these challenging times and will, as always, make protecting the safety of our customers and staff our top priority.

Our staff continue to work, managing and maintaining our waterways within the safe ways of working we have implemented over the past year. As we start to follow the roadmap out of Government restrictions, our operational priorities will be:

- ensuring safe navigation by inspecting each reach of our waterways for obstructions and marking them accordingly.
- a safe, phased approach to resume assisted passage in line with government advice that gives staff time to adjust to new ways of working.
- recruitment of seasonal staff, aiming for their return on 1 April 2021.

As we start to move out of the current lockdown, some local restrictions may still be in place and assets could be subject to closures for maintenance. Our level of service may also be affected due to some staff who are vulnerable and still need to shield. This means some tasks may not be carried out straight away, including assisted passage at some locks, however wherever possible we will maintain essential services and facilities for those boaters who live aboard and who have to make essential journeys.

To keep up to date with local information, see the following websites:

River Thames: <http://riverconditions.environment-agency.gov.uk/>

Anglian Waterways: <https://www.visitanglianwaterways.org/>

River Medway: <http://allingtonlock.co.uk/home.php>

For the latest guidance on Boat Safety Scheme certificates, please see the Boat Safety Scheme [website](#).

You can sign up for updates to river conditions, closures or strong stream advice for your water,

For Thames go to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/river-thames-restrictions-and-closures>

For Anglian rivers go to <https://www.gov.uk/check-river-conditions-and-closures/anglian-waterways>

For the Upper Medway go to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/river-medway-conditions-closures-and-restrictions>

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Question 2 How do steps 1 - 4 affect cruising on EA waterways?

Answer

Please refer to the [roadmap for navigation on Environment Agency waterways](#) for guidance on how steps 1 – 4 affect cruising.

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Question 3 Can I leave home to maintain my boat?

Answer

The essential maintenance of boats specifically for safety related issues and to ensure compliance with the navigation or harbour authority's published minimum safety requirements, including those specified by the Boat Safety Scheme and Maritime & Coastguard Agency, is allowed.

Boats owners, whilst abiding by [government guidance](#), may leave home to obtain services where necessary in order to fulfil legal obligations, specifically where those services relate to preventing potential risks of harm/injury to themselves or others.

Until 29 March - Travelling is only allowed for the purposes of undertaking essential safety related work on a boat. You should not stay longer than for the length of time required to undertake the necessary work. General maintenance work does not qualify as a reasonable excuse for leaving home or fall within the intended definition of recreation.

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Question 4 Will there still be assisted passage on EA waterways?

Answer

As we start to move out of the current lockdown, some local restrictions may still be in place and assets could be subject to closures for maintenance. Our level of service may also be affected due to some staff who are vulnerable and still need to shield. This means some tasks may not be carried out straight away, including assisted passage at some locks, however wherever possible we will maintain essential services and facilities for those boaters who live aboard and who have to make essential journeys.

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Question 5 Are your short-stay moorings still available and are you suspending the maximum mooring time?

Answer

From now – until 29 March 2021: We are lifting the time restrictions on the short stay moorings we own or manage, to assist those who live aboard their boats so that they can moor to access essential services. We have no control over short-stay moorings belonging to other providers such as local councils, boatyards or other landowners.

From 29 March onwards: we will reinstate the restrictions once the stay at home message is lifted.

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Question 6 Can I hire a boat / operate my hire boat / passenger / charter / hospitality business?

Answer

Please refer to the [roadmap for navigation on Environment Agency waterways](#) for guidance on how steps 1 – 4 affect boat hire, passenger boats and charter and hospitality businesses.

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Question 7 Can I use a canoe, rowing boat, stand-up paddle board, punt, sailing dinghy or pedalo on the waterways?

Answer

Please refer to the [roadmap for navigation on Environment Agency waterways](#) for guidance on how steps 1 – 4 affect watersports on our waterways.

For further advice please refer to

Sport England at <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/coronavirus>

British Canoeing at <https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/news/coronavirus-updates/>

British Rowing at <https://www.britishrowing.org/2020/06/latest-british-rowing-advice-on-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Royal Yachting Association at <https://www.rya.org.uk/knowledge-advice/current-affairs/Pages/coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>

Question 8 Are marinas open?

Answer

Please check directly with your marina.

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Question 9 Can people visit their boats?

Answer

Please refer to our [roadmap table](#) and the latest [government guidance](#) to assess your situation and the relevant timings to make sure you are compliant with the regulations.

The Environment Agency as a Navigation Authority is neither able to permit nor enforce against travel under government restrictions.

Please refer to [Question 3](#) for information regards to visiting your boat for maintenance.

If you are not able to travel to your boat to display your registration plate because of any restrictions, please don't worry, just do this when government restrictions allow.

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Question 10 Is it safe to swim / can I go swimming in the rivers?

Answer

For swimming, please refer to the latest [government guidance](#) to assess your situation and the relevant timings to make sure you are compliant with the regulations.

We strongly advise against diving from, or swimming in and around any of our structures as they can be dangerous places because of hidden hazards and strong currents. Please adhere to the warning signs at our structures and to any local messages issued. They are for your safety.

Check our [Strong Stream Advice](#). This advice is issued to inform river users when river levels are increasing and when locks are being prepared to discharge flood water.

A previously issued press release [Be aware of safety warning signs when swimming near water structures](#) explains about our structures and the dangers. Those who ignore the warnings are potentially putting their own lives at risk, but could be committing an offence leading to a day in court and a steep fine.

If you do visit our rivers, and especially if you have young children, please keep a watchful eye on where they are and what they are doing. It is very easy to get into difficulty very quickly even in shallow water.

Top safety tips are

- DO NOT jump or dive in as the depth of water may vary and there can be unseen hazards
- DO KEEP AWAY from weirs and sluices, locks and pipes as there can be strong currents around these
- INLAND WATER CAN BE COLD and swimmers can experience cramps and breathing difficulties
- KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR BOAT TRAFFIC, some larger boats may not be able to see you in the water
- Further guidance on the dangers of open swimming and staying safe around water can be found at:

[Open water safety](#)

[Winter water safety](#)

[Summer water safety](#)

[ROSPA: Water safety and drowning](#)

[Public Health England: reducing risk of illness when open water swimming](#)

[RNLI: Know the risks](#)

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Question 11 My Boat Safety Scheme certification is due to expire / has expired.

Answer

The Boat Safety Scheme is following current UK Government advice '[Guidance for people working in, visiting or delivering to other people's homes](#)' as a model. BSS Examinations will continue where it is safe to do so. Boat owners are asked to continue to contact an examiner to make the necessary arrangements. Those needing a certificate should do their best to use a local examiner to minimise non-essential travel.

Current BSS Certification expiry dates are not being extended. If your boat is not available to be examined due to COVID-19 issues and a BSS certificate is needed to support a registration, please contact us at boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk.

There is further information for boat owners making examination arrangements and the examination process on the [BSS website](#).

There is guidance for people working in other people's homes: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes>

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Question 12 Do I have to pay my boat registration and will I get a refund

Answer

Yes you still need to register your boat if you keep or use your boat on one of our waterways. This is a legal requirement for all our customers under the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010.

We are not able to give refunds or a reduction in the boat registration charge as a result of customers not being able to use their boats during the coronavirus restrictions. Our refund policy is clear that we do not offer refunds for waterway closures or restrictions. All boats kept afloat on our waterways must be registered by law and the full registration charge is due whether those boats are being used or not.

Although we understand that the various restrictions have limited customers' normal activity, this income is vital for us to us to continue to manage and maintain our waterways, ensuring people and the environment are protected from harm.

Our staff have not been furloughed, they have continued to work throughout to provide an appropriate level of service for our customers.

You can view our full refund policy [here](#).

Because of changes to our ways of working to meet government guidance we do not recommend you send postal applications at the moment – due to continuing restrictions on office access these are taking longer

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to process. We do have alternative payment options available. You will be able to set up a direct debit, pay by card, pay by bank transfer or we can send you an invoice.

If you are renewing your registration, contact the Boat Registration team via email boatreg@environment-agency.gov.uk or call 0330 159 1983 (Mon to Fri 8am to 6pm). If you are making a new application, please call 03708 506 506.

Our Boat Registration team continue to work at home because of the Coronavirus pandemic, this means they do not have access to the facilities to print and post the usual registration plates. Therefore we have had to adapt our ways of working across the business. For 2021, we will issue a 'print at home' document, similar to that of the Canal & River Trust, which is emailed out to customers.

This new approach does mean that customers will not have to wait to receive the registration plates through the post.

In terms of your registration plate, if you are unable to display it on your boat because of the restrictions, please just do this when government restrictions allow.

We recognise that displaying a paper registration plate will be difficult for unpowered and small open boats. If you are not able to display it, please have your email available at all times when using your boat.

We will print and post a registration plate to you if you do not have an email address or access to a printer. This may take a little longer than normal due to office access restrictions.

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Question 13 Where can I find your updates?

Answer

During previous lockdowns and lifting of restrictions we have provided regular updates to boating customers about our navigation service. We remain committed to doing this.

Our updates can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-agency-waterways-coronavirus-covid-19-update>.

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