

Guidelines on Outdoor Activities - Fieldwork for Geographical Study

(Please read this document in conjunction with “Guidelines on Outdoor Activities” issued by the Education Bureau. You may access the Education Bureau website and locate the "Guidelines on Outdoor Activities" by clicking "School Administration and Management > Administration > About activities > School Activities Guidelines".)

For these Guidelines, outdoor activities generally refer to land or water activities which are exploratory, challenging and physically demanding in nature, and planned and organised by schools for students’ participation in a natural environment under the guidance and supervision of appointed school staff /instructors.

I. Planning and Preparation

- 1) Fieldwork should be under the supervision of at least two school teachers/instructors. Under normal circumstances, a ratio of one teacher/instructor to eighteen participants is recommended.
- 2) Participants should be adequately trained before engaging in fieldwork. They should also be well prepared and properly equipped before the trip. The conduct of fieldwork should take the age, ability, and experience of the participants into consideration, and the activity must be finished in good time before dark.
- 3) Teachers/Instructors should visit the field before taking any participants there for fieldwork. The potential hazards in the field should be recorded and brought to participants' attention in a timely manner for safety.
- 4) Teachers/Instructors should, based on the speed of the slowest walker among all participants, estimate the time required for the trip, including the time for rest between stops. The walk should not be made too long. (Over very gentle terrain, an experienced adult walker can sustain a pace of about five kilometres per hour, while inexperienced and junior walkers can only keep a pace half as fast. If there are uphill sections, an extra hour will be needed for every 500 metres of uphill walking.)
- 5) Avoid steep slopes. A sudden change of gradient is a warning of danger. It is difficult to walk or conduct activities on slopes or footpaths steeper than 30 degrees.
- 6) Check in advance the time and height of high and low tides if walking or fieldwork along the coast is necessary. Activities on exposed shores with strong waves should be avoided.

- 7) Avoid conducting fieldwork in gorges. If the route passes through a valley, make sure that no part is impassable.
- 8) All participants should be made aware of the potential hazards present in the field and the necessary safety precautions during briefings on the fieldwork or upon arrival at the site. They should also be reminded to keep away from dangerous areas, such as cliffs and disused mines, and to take responsibility for their own safety, as well as the safety of others. The importance of keeping calm in dangerous situations should be emphasised.
- 9) Schools should work out emergency measures and procedures. All participants, including teachers/instructors, should understand their responsibilities and the actions to take in the event of an emergency.
- 10) Details of the field trip, including a route map, should be worked out beforehand. Such information should be given to a teacher/instructor designated to be on standby at the school for emergency liaison.
- 11) When carrying out fieldwork, participants may need to scatter over a vast area, and this renders direct supervision by teachers/instructors impossible. Teachers/instructors should therefore divide participants into groups of three or more beforehand and assign a member as the group leader. No participant should be allowed to work alone. Every participant should be aware of the appropriate actions to take in case of emergency.
- 12) Teachers/Instructors should pay attention to weather forecasts/reports before and during the field trip and receive such information through television, radio, newspapers and the Internet. For fieldwork conducted in groups, each group should bring at least one mobile phone for accessing weather information from the Hong Kong Observatory website or receiving weather updates via existing mobile applications. It is important to interpret weather forecasts with caution.
- 13) Fieldwork should be cancelled if:
 - a) a tropical cyclone warning no. 1 or above is issued;
 - b) red or black rainstorm warning is issued; or
 - c) a thunderstorm forecast/warning is issued.

- 14) School staff/instructors should take note of the Air Quality Health Index within the activity area. More information on the Air Quality Health Index can be obtained from the webpage of the Environmental Protection Department via the link below or by scanning the QR code on the right:

<https://www.aqhi.gov.hk/en/index.html>



Schools may also refer to the dos & don'ts for arranging physical activities during the health risk category at high, very high or serious levels under the Air Quality Health Index, as well as the related information via the link below or by scanning the QR code on the right:

https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/pe/references_resource/index.html



- 15) Students who are not physically fit or who have been granted exemptions from Physical Education lessons can be exempted from taking part in fieldwork.
- 16) The clothing and footwear of the participants should be appropriate for the fieldwork and the weather of the day. Participants should also carry along sunblock, insect repellent, windbreakers, raincoats and extra warm clothing.
- 17) Each group should carry along the most up-to-date map of a suitable scale. It should clearly show the area where the fieldwork is to be conducted and the route leading to the field. The group should also carry a compass, whistle, torch, walkie-talkie, mobile phone, first aid kit, adequate food and water, as well as emergency rations (please see the list of suggested items in [Appendix I](#)). Teachers/Instructors should check in advance whether the first aid kit contains all the essential items and make immediate replenishment if anything is missing or insufficient. All group members and participants should be notified of the way to access the first aid kit during the trip.

II. Points to Note during Fieldwork

- 1) Teachers/Instructors should study the “School Guidelines – for planning and implementing outdoor/ fieldwork activities at Country Parks” issued by the

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department before conducting fieldwork in country parks or special areas. The School Guidelines, which provide detailed information on countryside code, mobile coverage, preparation, safety concerns and waste reduction, are available on the webpage below:

https://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/country/cou_vis/cou_vis_gac/cou_who_a_sch_sat.html

- 2) Teachers/Instructors should exercise close supervision to ensure that participants act responsibly and behave properly.
- 3) On-site supervision of participants is always required. Conduct headcounts before and after the field trip, as well as when participants move from one location to another.
- 4) Participants should be informed who keeps the first aid kit and where it is located.
- 5) Before participants proceed to work in groups, teachers/instructors should remind them not to wander off or climb alone.
- 6) Flash floods may occur during and after heavy rains. Participants should evacuate the stream course as soon as the rain pours down, and avoid working in the stream after significant rainfall. A sudden rise in water level or an increase in the turbulence and turbidity of the flow may be a sign of an approaching flood. In such cases, all participants should stay away from the stream course immediately.
- 7) If a storm is imminent, participants should take shelter quickly and wait till the situation improves.
- 8) If there is a thunderstorm during fieldwork, keep away from ridges, summits and other high points, and avoid caves and cracks. Sit on insulating clothing if possible, and do not stay under trees or in small hollows. Keep a distance from walls and spires.
- 9) Light a fire only at designated campsites or barbeque sites. Put out the fire completely before leaving so that the risk of a hill fire is unlikely.
- 10) For fieldwork to be conducted in a polluted area, the following effective precautions should be taken:
 - a) Food and drinks, if needed, should be consumed before fieldwork.
 - b) Participants with unhealed wounds should be assigned the duty of

recording data.

- c) Latex gloves should be worn when collecting specimens or taking measurements.
 - d) Wellington boots should be worn for making way in polluted water.
 - e) Cuts and grazes should be covered with waterproof dressings or bandages.
 - f) Hands should be washed upon leaving the site.
- 11) Fieldwork groups should stay on existing footpaths and avoid taking new shortcuts, as snakes and venomous insects might be hiding in bushes and grasses. Moreover, new paths formed by treading are not safe because the soil may be loose.
- 12) The collection of animal and plant specimens should be avoided to reduce disturbance or harm to the wildlife and vegetation. Participants should be reminded that it is forbidden to collect specimens of protected or endangered species.
- 13) Safety precautions for fieldwork in the natural environment
- a) **Woodland**
 - i. Wear long-sleeved shirts and jeans or long pants to avoid the prick of thorny plants and the bite of mosquitoes, ticks and mites that transmit infectious diseases.
 - ii. Keep to unobscured footpaths where possible.
 - iii. Study the surrounding area carefully before going into bushy areas to observe or collect data.
 - iv. Examine rocks or logs before sitting on them. Do not lift stones or other objects by hand; always use a stick to turn them over first. Do not reach into holes in rocks or trees with bare hands.
 - v. Quite a number of wild plants are poisonous. Teachers/Instructors should warn participants against tasting fruits, seeds, or leaves of wild plants, or touching plants that may cause allergy or dermatitis. Examples are *Rhus chinensis* (sumac), *Rhus hypoleuca* (sumac), *Rhus succedanea* (wax tree) and *Euphorbia antiquorum* (fleshy spurge).

- vi. Participants should not touch dead vertebrates, which can be a source of infectious disease.
- vii. Participants should be warned against touching, feeding, disturbing, or agitating wild animals since quite a number of them are venomous creatures or carriers of fatal diseases.
- viii. When collecting data , take note of the following information and safety considerations:
 - Extreme care should be taken to prevent pricks when touching thorny plants. Gloves should be worn during data collection.
 - Extreme care should be taken to prevent bites from organisms hidden in the soil when collecting soil samples.

b) *Shore areas*

- i. All participants should wear shoes or boots with rugged soles.
- ii. A throw line must be carried along at all times.
- iii. Teachers/Instructors should always bear in mind the time of high and low tides, and make sure that all have returned to the land before high tide.
- iv. Avoid working on exposed shores with strong waves. Participants should be reminded not to attempt rock climbing, caving, swimming or diving.
- v. When carrying out fieldwork on rocky shores, participants should always watch out for angular or lichen-covered slippery rocks, and secure their footing before taking a new step. They should also be reminded of the danger of jumping between boulders.
- vi. When carrying out fieldwork among mangroves and on sandy shores, participants should test their footing in loose wet soil and ensure sufficient support before landing.

c) *Streams*

- i. All participants should wear shoes or boots with rugged soles.

- ii. A throw line must be carried along at all times.
- iii. Fieldwork in the streams involves risks because water currents, submerged objects and silts can be sources of hazards.
- iv. Participants should only work in streams with a solid bed and a depth below knee level.
- v. Be alert when stepping into streams. Always beware of potholes and underwater obstacles.
- vi. A sudden rise in the water level or an increase in the turbulence and turbidity of the flow may be a sign of an approaching flood. When this happens, all participants should stay away from the stream course immediately.

III. Measures for Emergencies

(Please refer to [Appendix II](#))

List of Suggested Items for Emergency Use

I. Navigation aids

Most up-to-date map(s) sealed in clear plastic bags, compass, map marker pens (oil-based), global positioning system device, offline maps downloaded on a smartphone and power bank

II. First aid kit

First aid items	Auxiliary tools
1. Roller bandages of various widths and triangular bandages	1. Disposable plastic gloves
2. Elastic bandages	2. Forceps
3. Sterile gauze	3. Scissors
4. Adhesive dressings of various sizes	4. Safety pins
5. Sterile eye pads	5. Body thermometer
6. Adhesive tapes	6. Handheld fan
7. Cold pack (such as ice pack)	
8. Cotton wool, cotton buds and towels	
9. Antiseptic solution	
10. Alcohol (70%)	

III. Emergency kit

Torch, whistle, mirror, radio, mobile phone, pocket knife, survival bag, emergency blanket, emergency rations (unexpired), lighters or matches, spare shoelaces, pen and slips of paper for jotting down messages in the event of an emergency (to be provided by school)

For water activities, repair toolboxes, spare paddles, towline, etc. should always be readily available.

IV. Emergency rations

Chocolate, cereal bars, glucose candies and dried fruit

V. Food and water

Drinking water per person: one litre in winter and two litres in summer; electrolyte drinks

(The emergency items listed above are provided for reference only. When the school arranges activities, it should prepare appropriate emergency supplies in accordance with the nature of the activity and safety considerations.)

Measures for Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, school staff/instructors are required to assume leadership, act in accordance with the established contingency plan, and notify the school management and/or designated staff members. If the responsible school staff member/instructor is injured, another accompanying school staff member/instructor should assume the leadership role. Students should follow instructions and work together to overcome difficulties.

Information about potential emergencies that may arise during some outdoor activities is outlined below for school staff/instructors' reference. Given the wide variety of diverse situations that may arise, the Guidelines cannot be considered exhaustive for all possible incidents that might happen during outdoor activities. School staff/instructors should respond flexibly and make reasonable judgements in light of the circumstances to ensure students' safety.

Land Activities

- 1) Stay calm during an emergency. Assess the situation and identify appropriate solutions. Evacuate to a safe place and use a mobile phone to call 999 or the international emergency number 112 for help. The ways for seeking help in the event of an emergency can be found in the relevant information in the Distress Guide from the Civil Aid Service via the link below or by scanning the QR code on the right:

<https://www.cas.gov.hk/eng/safe/distressguide.html>



- 2) Details of contingency measures for emergencies during some land activities, including getting lost, hill fires, flash floods, heat stroke and hypothermia, can be accessed via the links below or by scanning the QR codes on the right:

- Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department — Country Park Hiking Safety Guidelines

https://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/country/cou_vis/cou_vis_gac/cou_whe_sat.html



- Fire Services Department — Natural Disasters Common in Hong Kong

https://www.hkfsd.gov.hk/eng/education/cep_edu/cep/disaster_preparedness/natural_disasters_hk/



Water Activities

- 1) When assistance is required during emergencies at sea, it is essential to remain calm. The ways of seeking help during emergencies at sea can be found in the relevant information on the Maritime Distress Measures from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department via the link below or by scanning the QR code on the right:

https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/watersport/guideline/guid_distress.html



- 2) Relevant information about contingency measures in dealing with emergencies during some water activities, including accidents and capsizing incidents, can be obtained from the Potential Hazards during Water Sports Activities from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department via the link below or by scanning the QR code on the right:

https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/watersport/guideline/guid_hazards.html



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