

FROM THE NATIONAL ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY – Questions & Answers

Covid 19 Emergency Measures

March 31st, 2020

CORONAVIRUS: What the NAS is doing to help members

The National Allotment Society is working to provide clarity for our members on what the virus outbreak and ensuing impacts will mean for Allotment Holders. As more information become available, we will be updating our advice to our members, please read the Q & As below on how the outbreak is affecting Allotment Sites and their use.

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NAS Q & A On Allotments and Social Distancing

Protect yourself and your family

We are all living through a crisis, the likes of which the country has not experienced since war time. The community spirit that exists on allotment sites is now vitally important. Please remember to look out for one another during these very difficult times and take all the steps you can to reduce the risk of contagion from the Covid- 19 virus when you visit the plot.

Covid -19 - The virus that causes COVID 19 is mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. The droplets are too heavy to hang in the air and they quickly fall and contaminate floors and surfaces. Smaller airborne particles can remain in the air for some time. You can be infected by breathing in the virus if you are within close proximity of a person who has Covid-19- hence the 2m social distancing requirement, or by touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.

Can I still work my allotment during the Covid19 lockdown?

Yes, allotments are a great way of both getting exercise and obtaining food during this crisis.

Can I visit the allotment with my family?

Yes, government guidelines state that you can exercise with members of your household

Why then is the NAS suggesting that we consider going alone to the plot?

This is just a suggestion and plot-holders can decide for themselves but we are looking at the bigger picture and concerned about the risk of sites being shut – as they have been in Ireland and France. If some plot-holders are happy to visit alone or stay away for a few weeks that reduces this risk.

How long can I stay at the plot?

Government Ministers have suggested that an hour's walk is reasonable and asked us all to limit time spent outside the home. The Society believes that if you are using your plot for daily exercise it would be reasonable to spend an hour or two doing the jobs that need doing for that day and then to return home.

How can I ensure my family's and everyone else's safety at the plot?

Do not attend the plot if you have coronavirus symptoms or a family member is self-isolating

Take a flask of hot water, soap and paper towels to the plot with you (cold water will work too).

Use hand sanitiser (should be 60% alcohol content) before entering the site and opening any gate locks

Wash hands for at least 20 seconds after closing the lock, dry with a paper towel

The most effective part of hand washing is the drying using preferably paper towel to remove the layer of dead skin scales - on which virus and bacteria sit. Paper towel to compost heap.

DO NOT touch your face after using anything that has been touched by other people- use an elbow to work the push taps.

Wash your hands again for 20 seconds, dry with a paper towel before opening and closing the lock to leave the site

Use hand sanitiser after closing the lock

Wash hands when you get home

DO NOT gather together for a chat even if you are 2 metres apart

Observe "Social Distancing" with each other 2-3 metres

If you take your children to the plot, ensure that they stay within its confines and do not run around on communal paths and spaces.

Do not share tools

Do not wash your hands in water troughs

Can I drive to my allotment?

We do not have an overall answer to this question. Police forces are clamping down on non-essential travel, some have said that a short drive to the plot is permitted if there is no other choice, others are still enforcing the prohibition on driving to exercise. Check with your local force. Walk to the plot if at all possible and do not take public transport.

What about if I have hens or other livestock to care for at the plot?

Animal welfare considerations mean that this would be seen as essential travel even if further movement restrictions are put in place.

What changes should Allotment Associations make to site management?

Pin up information about social distancing and hygiene on a notice board or the gate, there is a QR code at the bottom of this page that links to our updating page.

Undertake risk assessments and take appropriate action to reduce hazards around any areas of the site that could cause contagion e.g. communal water troughs, taps, and gate locks. The NAS does have further detailed information on risk assessments and the duty of care for Self-Managed Associations please email natsoc@nsalg.org.uk if this is required.

All communal facilities including toilets should be closed

It is essential that no un-authorized people are allowed onto the plots for the duration of this emergency, if you do wish to bring someone to assist with work on the plot, please ensure that that this is notified either to Secretary or Site Manager. Careful consideration should be given to introducing anyone over 70, those with underlying illness or pregnant women.

Shops - those Associations who operate shops should close or put an on-line scheme in place. Where goods are ordered by email, payment is electronic and goods are placed out for collection.

Bonfires and BBQs - Could those Associations who allow bonfires all year round ask people to consider their neighbours and not burn anything during this covid19 emergency. Many sites are surrounded by houses where vulnerable people may be getting their only bit of fresh air through an open window. This consideration also applies to BBQs.

Plot inspections and allocations should be postponed until they can be done safely and within government guidelines

It is likely that a percentage of plot-holders will be unable to visit their plots, perhaps a buddy system could be put in place, untended plots could at least be covered.

Government advice about the Coronavirus is updated on a regular basis at this link.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>