

RESCUES

Appendix 9: Paddlesports During the Age of COVID-19

May 22, 2020

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to present a set of suggested paddlecraft practices, based on currently available information. These suggestions are provided to assist paddling instructors and event organizers and do not replace guidance from federal (e.g., CDC), state, and local authorities (e.g., health departments). In certain cases, it also may be advisable to check with your health care provider, attorney, insurance representative, and other appropriate experts. Local risk will depend on numerous factors. Individual instructors and event organizers are responsible for appropriate risk assessment and risk management. Note that each suggestion includes a “weighting.” In particular, “**Should**” means that, if at all possible, the suggestion should be carried out. On the other hand, “*Consider*” means that the recommendation is a good idea, but perhaps not as critical. Also please note that, although the suggestions below have been focused on kayak rescues, the same general principles should apply to most paddlecraft rescues.

General Principles

- Minimize the need for rescues (e.g., by planning, choice of venue, paddling well within the ability limits of all paddlers, etc.). (**Should**)
- Self-rescues are preferred over assisted rescues – self rescues should be practiced, if possible, *in advance* of paddling. (**Should**)
- As appropriate, choose routes in shallow water – this may afford the ability to walk or swim the boat to shore – thus significantly decreasing the likelihood of needing an assisted rescue. (*Consider*)
- The paddler should (unless medically contraindicated) carry some form of mouth and nose protection which is usable on the water (e.g., a neck gaiter). A neck gaiter can be worn already “in place” (covering the mouth and nose) or can be worn around the neck and pulled up prior to commencing the rescue. Alternatively, a neck gaiter can be kept inside a waterproof holder (e.g., a “Ziploc”). (**Should**)
- For assisted rescue practice: pair up people who have already had contact, avoid pairing up strangers, if possible. (**Should**)

The Rescuer

- Speed of execution is critical for assisted rescues (it minimizes exposure time). (**Should**)
- Consider position with respect to wind (e.g., rescuer upwind). (*Consider*)

- Consider designating a “protected person” if there is a need to do assisted rescues. A “protected person” is someone likely to be immune to the disease, or likely to be less severely affected if they do contract it. *(Consider)*
- Consider using the fastest/most skilled rescuer (to decrease length of contact time during assisted rescues). *(Consider)*
- Perform hand hygiene, if possible/reasonable, prior to performing an assisted rescue. *(Consider)*
- If practical, don mouth and nose PPE before moving in for the rescue – (if already wearing a neck gaiter, pull it up to cover mouth and nose; if stored in a Ziploc, retrieve it and put it on). ***(Should)***
NOTE: The above recommendation assumes that the neck gaiter is dry, and that a dry neck gaiter provides some degree of protection (this has not yet been proven). In addition, there is unfortunately no data available regarding the effectiveness of improvised masks, such as neck gaiters, when wet. Thus, we cannot offer any specific guidance as to whether, or not, they should be worn when wet.
- If practical, and if not already wearing eye protection, don eye protection (e.g., regular eyeglasses, sunglasses or, even better, safety glasses) before moving in for the rescue. ***(Should)***
- Consider boat positioning options. For example, T-rescues are typically taught with the rescuer facing the swimmer (“bow to stern”). Although the rescue may be (slightly) more difficult with a bow to bow positioning, this may be a safer position in terms of decreasing the possibility of disease transmission (not yet proven). *(Consider)*
- After the rescue, rinse decks, if possible, where the swimmer was positioned. *(Consider)*
- After the rescue, perform hand hygiene if possible. *(Consider)*
- It should be noted that certain types of rescues (e.g., hand of God, scoop, and especially “live bait”) will entail a high degree of interpersonal contact (thus a higher likelihood of disease transmission). Unfortunately, we cannot offer any concrete suggestions regarding how to handle these situations. This comment, of course, pertains to both the rescuer, and the swimmer.

The Swimmer

- While being T-rescued, the swimmer should hold on to the rescuing boat, as far away as possible from the rescuer (e.g., at the bow or stern, as opposed to close to the cockpit). ***(Should)***

- During a T-rescue, the time of highest risk for disease transmission is likely while the boats are side by side – therefore, *in advance of the event*, paddlers should practice getting spray skirts on as rapidly as possible to minimize this time. **(Should)**
- After the rescue, perform hand hygiene if possible. *(Consider)*

Additional Notes

- Although we are not recommending that paddlers utilize medical gloves (as PPE), many paddlers do wear paddling gloves. Since close, if not interpersonal, contact is a virtual certainty during rescues, this does raise the question as to how to perform hand hygiene if the paddler is already wearing paddling gloves. There appears to be several options:
 - Wash the hands (with gloves on) as soon as possible. Ideally this would involve both soap and water. Environmental conditions/concerns may, however, preclude this as an option.
 - Use a hand sanitizer (with gloves on).
 - Remove the gloves and then perform hand hygiene.
 - It is likely, albeit not proven, that cleaning or sanitization will be more effective on a non-porous (e.g., rubber like) surface, as opposed to a porous surface.
 - Because of the uncertainty of the above potential interventions, we cannot, at this time, make any recommendations.

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