

# TEACHING AND COACHING CONSIDERATIONS

## Appendix 11: Paddlesports During the Age of COVID-19

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### Introduction

This document presents a series of suggested practices for paddling instructors and coaches impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. 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. [Paddlesports During the Age of COVID-19: Risk Assessment and Risk Management](#) contains numerous recommendations, both in the main body of the manuscript, and in the appendices. This appendix is not intended to replace that document but, rather, builds on top of it with respect to paddlesports teaching and coaching considerations.

### Risk Assessment and Risk Management

In any paddlesports event, it is critical to continually assess risks and to implement strategies to manage the risks. These topics are discussed, at length, in the [Risk Assessment](#) and [Risk Management](#) appendices. Teaching and coaching may create additional risks for a paddlesports event (e.g., due to increased complexity, unknown and inappropriate skill level estimations, and so forth). However, these risks can be reduced and controlled through the use of appropriate mitigation strategies.

### Planning

It is abundantly clear that a meticulously planned paddlesports event is likely to be safer than an event which was “thrown together” at the last minute. Planning is discussed in detail in the [Event Planning](#) appendix. Additional considerations and suggestions relevant to teaching and coaching include the following:

- Carefully scope out the proposed training environment in advance of the event. Things to look for include areas from which it is possible to walk or swim boats to shore (thus decreasing the need to perform assisted rescues), shallow spots which may be useful as a location to “park boats” when doing demonstrations, launching and landing sites which allow for maintenance of social distancing, and areas to avoid (e.g., spots which might cause boats to “stack up”).
- Since beginner and novice paddlers often do not have the needed equipment, significant consideration may need to be given as to how to handle rental and loaner boats and gear.

- Smaller class sizes are easier to manage than larger classes. If there is a compelling need to have a group larger than 5 students, we recommend that additional qualified instructors be present and that the group be broken into smaller pods.
- Carefully think through how group formations will be managed to avoid boats stacking up on top of each other and to avoid boats being immediately downwind from each other.
- Lesson planning can have a major impact on increasing safety. As an example, by teaching the draw stroke sooner, rather than later, beginner students may be better able to keep themselves separated.
- As another example, in many classes, rescues are typically taught after strokes. For beginners, teaching self-rescues at the beginning of the class may decrease the need for assisted rescues during the inevitable capsizes. Specifically, the instructor might consider a sequence wherein the class begins with paddlers “going for a swim,” then swim their boats out, and then swim their boats in to shore. This would then be followed by getting in, and out, of their boats (ideally without assistance). Note that the practicality of doing this is highly dependent on the environment (e.g., doing this activity first would be fine in a warm weather environment, such as Florida, but might be less desirable in a cold weather or cold water environments).
- Consider whether certain didactic topics are best taught indoors, or outdoors. All else being equal, outdoors is probably preferable. However, a variety of factors, such as wind direction and speed, and adverse weather, may lead to the need to move indoors.
- Certain topics may also be taught remotely (e.g., via pre-course readings and video conference) prior to the in-person class. Although instructors should not rely solely on pre-course material, “front-loading” information for students may reduce the time needed for on-land instruction.

## Running an Event

Running an event is discussed in detail in the [Running a Paddlesports Event](#) appendix. Additional considerations and suggestions relevant to teaching and coaching, include the following:

- Marking boats with tape affords the opportunity to judge and maintain 6 feet (2 meters) social distance more easily. We have found it useful to mark the stern 6 feet (meters) behind the back of the kayaker’s head, and 6 feet (2 meters) in front of the paddler’s face. Painters tape can be used (it is easy to remove but may not be durable enough for the event). Alternatively, electrical tape is significantly more durable (it may leave a slight residue, but this generally can be removed with paint thinner or products such as Goo Gone).
- Participants should be explicitly informed that ALL activities are “challenge by choice” and if they have any concerns regarding loss of social distancing (or other breaches in infection prevention and control) then they should discuss these with the instructor and, if need be, refrain from participating in the activities of concern.
- Certain training activities might be better conducted by means of a manikin. For example, if available, a manikin could be used to demonstrate and practice hand of God and scoop rescues, while standing in shallow water.

- As with all paddlesports events, there should be a pre-launch safety brief. In addition to “normal topics” covered at a safety brief, there should be an explicit discussion of the infection prevention and control procedures which will be utilized.
- In addition, it should be emphasized that infection prevention and control is *everyone’s responsibility*, e.g., if you see someone approaching someone else, say something earlier rather than later.
- Carefully evaluate the skills (and potential issues) for all participants prior to leaving the vicinity of the launching area. For example, prior to heading out, all participants might be required to demonstrate a wet exit, and self-rescue. For an intermediate class, a roll might need to be performed by all participants.
- Carefully manage stroke drills, and other exercises, to avoid the loss of social distancing.
- It may be easier to manage group dynamics by having one, or two, students practice something as opposed to all students practicing simultaneously.
- Beginner and novice paddlers typically have an exceedingly difficult time holding position. This is especially true in a cross wind. In general, it is easiest to hold position with your bow into the wind. Stern into the wind is a bit more difficult. The most difficult situation is with the wind abeam. The class should be conducted in such a fashion so as to accommodate this boat positioning issue.
- Although rafting up has been a common practice (e.g., to rest and observe demonstrations), this practice should be avoided except for individuals who have already had prior contact.
- Given the potential increase in complexity associated with teaching events, strong consideration should be given to the designation of a “safety observer.” This observer should be focused on identifying and preventing breaches such as participants losing social distancing, participants touching shared objects without using hand hygiene, etc.

## Rescues

Rescues are discussed, in detail, in the [Rescues](#) appendix. Additional considerations and suggestions, relevant to teaching and coaching, include the following:

- As mentioned above, consider teaching self rescues early in the curriculum (in order to decrease the need for unplanned assisted rescues).
- The “Tampa T Rescue” is a modified T rescue technique which maintains social distancing. It can be taught during classes, practiced by participants, and used in the event of unplanned capsizes. A video and written description has been posted online.
- Many paddlers - even highly skilled ones - “futz” while putting on their spray skirts. This wastes time and can increase the chance of sustained close contact. The solution for this is straight forward – paddlers should be encouraged to practice getting their spray skirts on rapidly. This practice can even occur on dry land.
- If possible, individuals who have already had prior contact should be paired up for rescue practice.
- If this is not possible, then strangers should only be paired up after a restatement of the risks of disease transmission, a reminder that all activities are challenge by choice, and with the participants giving their explicit approval.

- Certain types of rescues, e.g., scoop and hand of God are probably impossible to do without loss of social distancing. Unless one of the two options previously described is possible, then it may not be feasible to have all participants practice or demonstrate these rescues. In the context of an ICW, this might lead to the option of passing the students with a continuation based on demonstrating the rescues that they have not yet done.
- Rolling instruction is going to be particularly challenging, given the sustained close quarters contact which is often needed. It may be possible to perform roll training if an assistant (who has had previous contact with the student) is available to stand next to the student and “right” them and their boat if they miss the roll. This assistant would need to be taught how to do an assisted wet exit, and a hand of God rescue, prior to assisting.
- Snorkel (dive) masks have been in wide use for the purpose of teaching rolling. If these are going to be used, participants should bring their own masks. Anti-fog solution (not spit) should be used to prevent fogging. If masks are going to be used, then participants should be instructed to sanitize their hands, prior to putting the mask on. In addition, they should NOT clear or remove their masks in the usual frontal fashion (since this could lead to touching the face with contaminated hands). If a mask needs to be removed, or fogs up, participants should remove it from the back of the head (ideally after sanitizing their hands).

## **The Need for Practice**

Most of the strategies and techniques discussed in this document are simple to perform. However, incorporating these numerous interventions will be a new way of running classes for most, if not all, instructors. Accordingly, we strongly recommend that prior to running classes for the general public, instructors should run one or more “practice” sessions in order to become comfortable with these interventions and to “get the kinks out.”

## **What Classes Can I Teach Now?**

There is no easy answer to this question. Each instructor/trainer/educator will need to make their own determination of the potential risks versus the potential rewards. Things to consider include the following:

- It is much easier to do assisted rescues (without losing social distancing) in long boats, e.g., sea kayaks, as opposed to short boats (e.g., whitewater boats and recreational kayaks).
- Due to lack of core skills, beginners are more likely to need close-quarters assistance than are higher level paddlers.
- Due to the much more challenging environments that they may prefer, advanced paddlers may also need assistance and may be more at risk for injury.
- Accordingly, the likely “sweet spot” for teaching, given the COVID-19 pandemic, is probably at the novice and intermediate levels.

Specifically, with respect to the question: Is it possible to run ACA IDWs, ICEs and ICWs, for sea kayaks, while maintaining social distancing (and other infection prevention and control principles)?

- L1: By teaching and using the Tampa T Rescue, it should be possible for candidates to meet all criteria in the ACA curricula and be certified.
- L2: It should be possible to meet most criteria, except for the scoop, hand of God, and rafted T rescues. These may be possible if “buddies” are present who have been previously exposed to each other (or who are willing to acknowledge and accept the risk of close quarters contact with a stranger). If buddies cannot be found, a “continuation” could be given for these rescues.
- L3 adds additional close quarter’s rescues, more challenging conditions, and the possibility of increased interpersonal contact.
- L4 and L5 are done in environments which virtually guarantee the likelihood of unplanned assisted rescues, an increased chance of injury, and sustained close quarters contact with strangers. Risk is *significantly higher* at these levels.

## Summary

As with all paddlesports activities, instructional events must be planned for, and managed, with continual attention to risk assessment and risk management. Ultimately, the decision to run or participate in an instructional event is a choice that each paddlesports leader and paddler must make for themselves, based on the balance between potential risks and rewards. Although COVID-19 is creating new challenges for the paddlesports community, the good news is that there are ways to deal with many (albeit not all) of the risks. This is especially true for lower and mid-level training. Advanced training does, however, create a much higher degree of risk and exceedingly difficult choices are going to need to be made.

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