

September 16th, 2020

Re: Ocean and coastal access – COVID-19 risk reduction and safety protocol.

Goal:

To outline the protocols for the Safe use of the ocean for surfing and similar water sports and related stakeholders during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Aim:

To demonstrate that surfers and similar ocean activities enthusiasts can safely engage in their activity within the existing COVID-19 risk reduction guidelines.

To guide ocean users on the methods for using the ocean in a manner that significantly reduces the risk of transmitting the COVID-19 disease.

Introduction:

The Novel Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is recognised as a severe threat to people, society and the way of life as we know it. We acknowledge that drastic action is required to minimise the risk of transmission. COVID-19 illness, particularly transmission management, can be expected to be a significant consideration for all human activity for several months and even years to come.

Ocean sports athletes, enthusiasts and related stakeholders would like to propose protocols for the use of the ocean in a manner that allows the engagement in their respective activities in a manner that respects the health guidelines regarding the reduction and elimination of COVID-19 illness transmission. Athletes and outdoor pursuit enthusiasts are looking to be role models of individual responsibility during this time. While the complete avoidance of all human activity would prevent transmission, the impact on humans, to have their sport and other healthy activities prohibited longer than absolutely necessary, could severely impact their mental and physical health. We seek to propose a way to minimise the impact of such prohibitions on persons who seek to pursue their lives responsibly and safely. Several jurisdictions regionally and internationally provide templates for safe activity related to the ocean.

No events, contests, surf lessons, coaching or similar activities that necessitate congregating in groups are being proposed for consideration at this time. Athletes are requesting safe, limited access to the ocean and then depart the beach / coastal area immediately upon completion of the specified activity.

COVID-19 illness transmission reduction protocol:

The current guidelines from the WHO and the local Ministry of Health of the GORTT can be summarised as:

- Illness transmission and contagion occurs by close physical interaction between an infected person and other people.
- Measures need to be put in place to reduce or prevent close physical interaction of people.

- These measures are social distancing, no physical contact with others, frequent hand-washing and sanitisation, no contact with the personal property of those outside of your household.
- Personal wellness monitoring and self-quarantining and illness testing should any COVID-19 illness symptoms appear.

The current laws of T&T (circa 31st, August 2020) have been developed to ensure ease of enforcement to fundamentally drive home the message that the population need to take the pandemic and precautions seriously. We would like to advocate for individual responsibility and activity-specific precautions.

The fact remains that this disease is going to affect the World's population well into 2021 and based on same we believe that the Government can safely grant access to the affected members of the public given that the Guidelines stipulated below are closely followed.

Proposal for consideration:

We politely propose that ocean-users be considered for responsible activity. Fundamentally, accessing the ocean, to surf, or swim-train, or snorkel and free-dive, kayak, Stand-Up-Paddle, and similar and related activities pose minimal to no possible route of COVID-19 transmission. This type of consideration has been given to similar ocean users regionally, such as Barbados and internationally such as California, Hawaii, Australia, Bali and others. We urge the decision makers and the powers that be to consider the following guidelines to be implemented in the short term until such time that the infection rate on the island is reduced to a level that would allow for a complete removal of all restrictions currently in place.

Guidelines:

- **Access to the beaches will be granted to members of the public between the hours of 6:00AM-9:00AM Daily.** (It is our firm belief that this timed access would assist in limiting the volume of persons desiring access to the beaches. Those that so choose to visit are more likely to be members of the population engaged in Health and wellness activities.)
- The times indicated would reflect actual times the public can physically access the areas in question. No exceptions.
- While engaging in exercise and wellness activities on the beach, members of the public must follow social distancing guidelines as outlined by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- Sitting, Lying, standing, sunbathing, sight-seeing, picnicking and all other non-exercise, passive or sedentary activities on beaches are prohibited.
- Items for sitting or lying on the beach are prohibited for either use or possession on beaches, such as umbrellas, shade structures, tents, barbeques grills, sand or beach toys, coolers and beach chairs.
- The consumption of alcoholic beverages within 100 meters area of the high-water mark is strictly **prohibited**.
- All other Public Health restrictions currently in place would apply to Members of the public while commuting to and from these coastal beach areas.

Any member of the public found to be in breach of these regulations would be liable to the penalties, fines and convictions as outlined in the recently revised Public Health Ordinance Act.

Some Facts to Consider

Surfing:

Surfing is one of the many ocean pursuits of this island nation. Surfing is a solitary activity that requires no close interaction with other surfers or ocean users. A surfer arrives at the coast, prepares his board and equipment, then makes his way to the shore to warmup briefly, enters the sea and then spends his time in the breaking waves. A surfer naturally maintains at least a 2-meter distance from fellow surfers when in the sea, to avoid collision and to stay out of the way of other surfers. When the surfer has decided to finish his time in the sea surfing, he exits the sea and can depart the beach (by vehicle or foot, as applicable, and covered under the existing regulations for public places). The environment is open air, lots of space for physical distancing, fresh air, sunshine and seawater, and the risk of transmission is demonstrably minimal. Guidance from WHO, CDC and similar supports minimal risk of virus transmission in environments like this, while supporting exercise and the outdoors activity for mental and physical health.

Surfers are specialist water users who access usually remote coastal areas without any reliance on lifeguards. Surfers utilise coastal areas with rough seas that naturally discourage bathers and gatherings of people in the sea and on the nearby beach/coastline.

Several similar activities such as, but not limited to jogging, running, bike-riding, hiking, tennis and golfing are presently being safely conducted in several appropriate locations in T&T.

Summary:

Surfers, and by extension all members of the public who utilise the coastal areas for health and wellness, would like consideration to safely use the ocean and return home without congregating at the beach before or after the activity. We believe this is in line with other fitness and sport pursuits that allow for the mental and physical health during these stressful times.

Sincerely,



JP Rostant

President

SATT

References:

1. safe-activities-during-COVID-1919

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/safe-activities-during-COVID-1919/art-20489385>

2. Deciding to Go Out

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/deciding-to-go-out.html>

3. WHO website: Q&A: Be Active during COVID-19-19, 27 March 2020

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/be-active-during-COVID-19-19>

4. Santa Barbara County Public Health Press Release.