

Recovery and Opening Strategies for Zoos and Aquariums Under Covid-19 Restrictions

Reopening of zoos and aquariums must be carried out with careful planning to ensure that all Government guidance is followed regarding social distancing, and that risk of infection to public, staff and animals is reduced as far as is practically possible. BIAZA is liaising with relevant Government departments and is collaborating with BALPPA, UK Hospitality, ALVA, NFAN and other professional associations to align UK guidance. We are also monitoring success of the reopening strategies of zoos and aquariums located in other international regions which are ahead of the UK curve, and therefore are starting to lift restrictions.

A flexible and phased reopening of individual zoos and aquariums will be necessary as site-specific infrastructure and operations will need to be considered suitable for the social distancing requirements. Each individual site will need to prepare its own site-specific reopening strategy, based on Disease Risk Assessments (DRAs) and appropriate Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). (There is a template risk assessment available to download [here](#) on the BIAZA website and HSE provide examples [here](#)).

Reopening strategies should plan for the coming months in phases, with operational restrictions which can be lifted gradually as national restrictions are relaxed, but can also be put back in place if Government guidelines deem it necessary.

Prior to reopening, BIAZA therefore recommend that all zoos and aquariums ensure that they have taken the following steps:

- ✓ Carried out and documented thorough Disease Risk Assessment for all aspects of operations and developed appropriate SOPs as necessary to align with this.
- ✓ Produced a site-specific, phased reopening strategy, considering the points within this guidance.
- ✓ Informed the relevant local authorities regarding proposed date of opening and the measures taken to ensure the safety of visitors, animals and staff.
- ✓ Shared reopening dates and mitigation plans with the BIAZA Office.

This document provides a list of points to consider whilst developing a reopening strategy, and should be used in conjunction with the relevant Government guidance and available information (see 'Further Reading and References'). Content will be reviewed and regularly updated as Government guidelines change over the coming months. An updated draft will be kept available on the [BIAZA website](#), along with a range of other Covid management resources.

Please don't hesitate to contact the [BIAZA Office](#) for more information, or with specific queries or concerns.

Critical points for consideration during the development of reopening strategies for each zoo and aquarium include those listed below.

Communicating that zoos and aquariums are safe environments for the public to visit

- Demonstrate clear social responsibility and communicate a commitment to supporting the Government Guidelines on Covid-19 in public messaging.
- Reassure the public with clear information (on website, social media, around site) about the full measures and rules in place on the site, especially those concerning any restrictions on visitor numbers and/or movement, and restricted catering provisions.
- Consider ways of communicating what a visitor may expect from your zoo when you reopen using images or video. This can provide reassurance but also help them visualise what they need to do when they visit.
- Remind visitors (at the entrance, around site, on website, pre-visit emails, on social media) that it is also their responsibility to maintain social distancing measures, for their benefit and that of other visitors, staff and animals.
- Provide regular on-site reminders for visitors about best practice in hygiene (regular effective hand-washing, coughing into the elbow etc).
- Ensure staff members are trained to support visitors with social distancing and the new measures that have been adopted.
- Review onsite printed or digital material such as maps or apps to include reminders of social distancing or changes in how visitors will experience the site.
- Include a reminder on website when purchasing tickets to ask purchaser to delay visit if they are feeling unwell.
- Work with others such as BALPPA and Visit England to create consumer confidence to visit zoos and aquariums.

Limiting Numbers of Visitors

- Each institution should set a maximum visitor number based on Government guidance if available (i.e. currently allowing 2m social distancing, or 4 square meters per visitor), or a site-specific Disease Risk Analysis. Set conservative limits on visitor numbers on initial reopening, and increase those gradually as social distancing practices are tested and found to be effective.
- IAAPA provide further guidance on calculation of capacity in their [Reopening Guidelines](#). If necessary data is not available however then a conservative approach could be initial opening with under 50% normal maximum capacity, increasing to under 75% capacity if the social distancing and safety measures put in place are deemed to be successful.
- The calculated capacity should consider both the overall number of people and the number of groups – i.e a single group of 5 can distance themselves as a single unit where as separate groups of 2 and 3 will distance as 2 units.
- The total figure can be managed across a whole day or in shorter visiting sessions with due consideration given to average dwell time (e.g. morning or afternoon sessions) or with capped, timed entry slots.
- The maximum number of visitors should allow for car parks to be safely managed e.g. taping off every other space if necessary.
- Reopening on a weekday rather than a weekend, to limit the pressure on staff and allow time to test the safety measures and fine-tune them would be advisable.
- Online ticketing systems can be controlled to only allow a set maximum number of sales for each day/time slot. A proportion of tickets can be withheld to be made available for purchase on the admissions gate if necessary.

- Preferential ticket access may be provided for members by asking them to book free tickets through an online system, and ensuring a set proportion of available tickets is reserved for members only.

Controlling Ticketing and Admissions

- Online ticket purchase processes should be considered as the primary/only method of ticket purchase, in order to manage number of (and proportion of member:non-member) sales, and to reduce the level of contact between visitors and gate staff. Relaxing any restrictions on online purchase (e.g allowing them to be purchased online on the day of the visit) can facilitate this.
- Where face-to-face exchanges are necessary (for information, tickets or other purchases), measures such as those successfully tested in supermarkets should be employed, including installation of plastic screening at ticket/information desks.
- Cashless card/phone payments should be encouraged, rather than use of cash, and card machines etc need to be regularly wiped using a suitable cleaning agent.
- Painted lines, decals or other indicators should be used to maintain the 2m distancing in queues.
- A safe and managed waiting area may need to be provided if selling timed tickets.
- Electronically controlled access systems and/or other forms of personnel control should be used to ensure that incoming visitors are counted and limited to the maximum number of visitors that can safely be allowed on site at any one time.
- Visitors leaving the zoo or aquarium should also be counted to ensure maximum numbers are not exceeded, either manually, using clicker counters or via turnstile exits. If there are multiple admission/exit points, these may need to be reduced to best facilitate this.
- Consider separating entrance and exit routes to assist in reducing congestion.
- If necessary, use staff to manage flow of visitors as they are arriving and departing.
- Where till or admission points are together consider closing every other one to support distancing requirements.
- Consider special opening times for vulnerable people.
- If possible minimize indoor queuing by restricting queue to only one party member per party.
- Invest in hand washing facilities at entrance.
- It may be worth considering that in visitor attractions reopening in other regions, body temperature checks or thermal scanning are routinely carried out on staff and in some cases, also on visitors.

Controlling visitor flow

- A one-way system around the site (whole or selected areas), clearly communicated through signage, may help reduce visitor to visitor contact. This route should take into account points of interest in terms of exhibits and guest experience, but also availability of facilities such as toilets and catering outlets.
- Pinch points should be managed e.g. with extra barriers, signage or presence of staff.
- Where possible regular hand-washing opportunities or hand sanitiser stations should be provided along the route.
- Group sizes may need to be limited in sites with narrow pathways and multiple pinch points.
- Consider 'household groups' (i.e. those individuals living in a safe household who do not need to maintain social distancing from each other) when managing queues and use of facilities etc.
- Consider making regular announcements to remind staff and visitors to follow social distancing advice and visitor flow requirements.

- If lifts are in operation, regularly cleaning is required and signage to ensure only one party access lift at a time.

Controlling Visitor Grouping

- Any scheduled activity that draws a crowd, e.g. keeper talks, animal shows or feeding times, should be suspended unless measures can be taken to enable social distancing between household groups (i.e. groups of people who live together and are therefore not required to carry out social distancing from each other). Consider installing TVs to provide looped video footage of previous shows/feeding or informing visitors of online content that they can watch on mobile device.
- Non-scheduled feeding of high-profile animals that are likely to draw a crowd should be done before or after opening hours or as discreetly as possible, unless crowds can be managed.
- Play areas should be kept closed in early stages of reopening or until a time when they can be managed effectively whilst supporting social distancing.
- Clear guidance should be provided to school groups to facilitate their visit whilst ensuring protective measures can be met. Working with the individual schools in advance will be important to also consider schools' own guidance.
- Any additional events held, should be within the site capacity restrictions already identified, until restrictions of assembly between non-household groups have been lifted.
- Emergency plans (including fire and animal escape procedures) should be risk assessed to account for social distancing measures.

Controlled Reopening of Catering and Retail Outlets

Special thought needs to be given to opening catering and retail outlets in initial stages of reopening and it may be worth considering delaying opening these outlets in initial phases. Where appropriate to reopen, please consider the following points.

- Consider allowing visitors to bring a picnic and picnic blankets.
- Providing a limited range of take-away food and drinks only (no self-service food) or pop-up style retailing may be advisable in the early stages of reopening, with fixed menu displays provided on boards (as opposed to smaller menus on tables to be handled by guests). Additional seating may be required.
- Where till points are close together, consider closing every other one.
- Wherever possible cashless payments only should be encouraged.
- Seating areas must be suitably spaced apart and if they are fixed in place, alternate ones should be removed or taken out of action to maintain social distancing.
- If opening with a take-away operation, at first create additional outside seating where practical.
- Catering furniture will need to be disinfected appropriately where practical after each use.
- Use floor markings to support adherence to 2 metre separation especially around counters and queue lines.
- Place clear signage in and around outlets reminding visitors of the social distancing measures and asking them to follow the rules.
- Introduce additional cleaning measures to high frequency touchpoints such as door handles, pin pads etc.
- Consider leaving non-essential doors open to reduce the number of touch points when using the space. This does not apply to fire doors.
- Review the layout of shops and restaurants to ensure walkways are as clear as possible removing display fixtures if necessary. Consider one-way systems using floor markings and signage.

- Shops and restaurants should limit the number of visitors allowed at any one point.
- If your retail outlet is at the exit of your zoo or aquarium, you should consider moving stock to allow free exit flow.
- Introduce additional hand washing or hand sanitiser stations at entrances and inside shops and restaurants.
- Consider reviewing the essential or relief item range and provide options for hand sanitiser, anti-viral wipes and face coverings such as masks, scarfs or snoods.

Toilets

- Toilets should ideally be permanently staffed in order to limit the number of visitors using them at any one time and also to allow cleaning after each use.
- Display signage explaining that the toilets are wiped down with a suitable cleaning agent every X minutes/or after every use.
- Display signage to reiterate that the customer is responsible for washing their hands effectively after using the toilet.
- Wherever possible, motion sensor operated doors, flushing, taps and dryers should be used to limit hand contact.
- Hand sanitiser dispensers should be made available outside each toilet facility.
- Wherever possible external access doors should remain fully open
- Queues should be managed with floor markings and signage etc to maintain 2m spaces.
- Consideration may need to be given to provision of extra toilets to facilitate a one-way route if that is deemed necessary.

Enclosed Exhibits (including aquariums)

- As with outside sites, a maximum capacity which allows safe social distancing must be identified for all enclosed exhibits.
- As with outside sites, staff must be positioned at entrances and at practical intervals to monitor and control numbers and crowd flow.
- A one-way system should be introduced if the space does not allow for visitors to keep a 2m distance.
- Where exhibits are placed at potential pinch points, it may be necessary to close/relocate these to deter lingering if possible.
- Any smaller indoor areas that cannot be operated on a one-way basis, especially where the entrance and exit are the same door, may need extra restrictions (e.g. one party entry at a time) or may need to be kept closed to visitors for longer.
- Ensure that all surfaces are cleaned regularly with suitable cleaning agents. Glass and similar surfaces should also be dried where possible, particularly where moistening through condensation or from aquatic exhibits is likely.
- Please consider applying social distancing between humans and animals in the same way as between humans.

Protecting Animals

- Pay special attention to species which are known to have the potential for infection, i.e. chiroptera, felids, mustelids, rodents and primates. DRAs for these groups should include consideration of surveillance and screening as well as the additional points below.
- Preventative and curative veterinary health care programmes should include data collection from clinical or post mortem cases in high risk or other species to demonstrate the consideration of Covid-19, be it stored samples for retrospective assessment or other.
- Where possible keep animal contact areas involving species with known risk of infection closed in initial phases (e.g. lemur or bat walk-through exhibits).
- Do not schedule any public close contact animal experiences.

- Where possible a 2m space should be implemented between stand-off barriers and permeable (e.g. mesh) enclosure perimeters. Consider Perspex barriers or closure of sections of the zoo to protect species or individual animals of particular concern.
- Consider provision (where available) of suitable PPE for all staff who operate within close contact of animals and prepare feed for animals, including surgical facemasks and gloves (if available).
- Where gloves are not worn, hands should be washed regularly, particularly before and after food preparation.
- Minimise the number of keepers who are in contact with the animals and ensure social distancing of 2m is upheld where possible between keepers and animals.
- Reduce contact between keepers and visitors/staff from departments in close contact with the public. This may involve temporary barriers to ensure social distancing whilst work is carried out.
- Disinfect items that are removed and added to enclosures e.g. enrichment and feed dishes.
- Consider reviewing training protocols, e.g. review current requirement for training, the appropriate use of PPE, options for maximising the distance between trainer and animal etc. We would advise that close contact training is not carried out during this time, unless a cessation of training would negatively impact welfare.
- Ensure robust pest control procedures (especially to control wild rodents in animal areas) are in place.
- Refer to the European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians – Transmissible Diseases Handbook for further information (available [here](#) on the BIAZA website).

Parks with Drive-through Sections or Rides

- Safari parks and others with extensive drive-through enclosures may be able to open sooner as private vehicles by definition ensure social distancing.
- Rides or vehicles such as buses, trains or monorails may have to be suspended, unless measures can be put in place to maintain distancing and hygiene (e.g. distancing while queueing, rendering some seats unusable to maintain distancing, regular cleaning, controlled exiting etc).
- Public should not be allowed to hand feed any animals.
- There may be a low risk of zoo animals contracting Covid-19 through direct physical contact with vehicles. In practice this low risk is likely to apply mostly to primates which may make contact with vehicles and handle parts that the occupants have recently touched (e.g. door handles). Appropriate disinfection of those parts could be considered, or drive-through routes could be amended to exclude primate areas. As with all other stock a robust health surveillance process should be in place.

Handwashing Facilities

- Where possible, regular opportunities for hand washing should be provided along visitor routes. Public education notices at these stations should remind visitors of the importance of washing hands thoroughly for 20 seconds.
- Where additional sink areas cannot be installed, hand sanitiser stations at the entrance and along routes should be provided, with disinfecting alcohol gels made with over 60% alcohol. (Some alcohol-free hand sanitisers are also effective but test data should be checked to confirm suitability against Coronavirus). Notices should remind visitors that 30 seconds is required to effectively sanitise hands with these products.

Cleaning

- Ensure all cleaning regimes are aligned with guidance from those relevant authorities such as [Health & Safety Executive](#).

- Normal opening and closing times may need to be changed to allow staff time to suitably clean visitor areas and safety barriers or carry-out certain animal care duties. This may apply to the whole site or individual buildings.
- Multi-touch areas (e.g. door handles, switches, toilet flushes, hand rails) need regular (e.g. hourly) disinfecting. These high-risk areas should be wiped with disinfectants used at appropriate dilutions appropriate for SARS-CoV-2. Ensure that the manufacturers' guidance on specific products is followed correctly in terms of both dilution and contact time to act effectively against Coronavirus.
- All cleaning products test data should be checked to ensure they are effective against Coronavirus.
- It may be advisable to employ the fogging of disinfectants/use of disinfectant aerosols to be used against Coronavirus in enclosed spaces, taking into account manufacturer's recommendations.

Limiting the Spread of Coronavirus

- It is advisable to review job roles on a case by case basis to assess PPE requirements (including facemasks). If supplied it is important that any PPE is used correctly to minimise the risk of infection. The use of such PPE does not replace or reduce the need to follow good hygiene practices as provided by government advice.
- Provide regular and visible written/verbal communication of government advice especially when it is updated.
- Provide daily reminders for your staff about hand washing is important.
- Provision of hand sanitiser in high traffic/visitor interaction areas such as admissions, tickets sales, shop and restaurants tills, staff rooms and delivery entrances.
- Regular cleaning of door handles, keypads, stair hand rails etc should be carried out, including deep cleaning of work areas periodically.
- Facilitate regular hand washing breaks for staff.
- Remind staff not share items for example pens, cups where possible.

Protecting Your Colleagues

- Ensure all staff are aware of new social distancing and hygiene measures especially if they have recently return from a period of absence.
- Introduce an effective training programme which covers the organisations arrangements but that can be adapted departmentally with more specific information.
- Normal operating workplace risk assessments for staff should be reviewed for Covid conditions.
- Develop a plan for returning staff including consideration of office space and a continuation of home working for certain roles.
- Remind staff of the process to follow if they are displaying symptoms and to look out for them in others.

Please feel free to contact the [BIAZA Office](#) to discuss the reopening of your collection.

Further Reading and Resources

ALVA Attractions Recovery Tracker: <https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ALVA-Attractions-Recovery-Tracker-Wave-1-20-24-April-comp.pdf>

HSE advice for businesses: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/social-distancing-coronavirus.htm>

HSE example risk assessments: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/>

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Ireland Government Covid-19 Guidance <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

European Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians – Transmissible Diseases Handbook for further information: <https://biaza.org.uk/covid-19-guidance-for-zoos-and-aquariums>

Gateway Ticketing Webinar on reopening strategies:

https://www.gatewayticketing.com/community/webinar-reopening-strategies-and-transitioning-to-a-capacity-managed-attraction/?utm_source=Media+List&utm_campaign=730a5794ef-Reopening+Strategies_PR&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f4b30efd92-730a5794ef-350427193

IAAPA Reopening Guidance: https://iaapa.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/IAAPA_COVID-19_ReopeningGuidance_final.pdf

Tips for opening safely (Saint Louis Union Stations entertainment destination)

<https://bloop.com/features/reopening-after-covid-19-st-louis-union-station/?source=newsletter>

UK Government Guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19#social-distancing-in-the-workplace---principles>

Visit Britain Recommendations for Government to support Reopening:

https://www.visitbritain.org/helping-tourism-industry-recover-covid-19#utm_source=VBVE_Enews_06_05_2020&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=VBVE_06_05_2020