



EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR HYPERBARIC MEDICINE

EUBS & ECHM position statement

on the advisability of recreational and professional diving and performing diving medical examinations during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak

As a result of strict preventive measures taken by almost all countries worldwide to combat the spread of SARS-CoV2 and COVID-19 disease, there is a significant impact on the availability of healthcare resources, not only hospital-based but also for emergency first aid and patient transport.

Generally, all sports activities are advised against, except those that can be undertaken alone or in pairs or very small numbers, and then only if sufficient distance between participants can be guaranteed and sharing of sports equipment is avoided.

During (recreational) diving there is not only the impossibility to observe the minimum recommended distance of one meter (as per the WHO recommendations on COVID-19 prevention), but it is also impossible to guarantee that respiratory equipment will not be shared (e.g. in the event of an underwater out-of-air incident). The use of rental equipment may also pose a risk for transmission of the virus.

Moreover, because even with careful planning and restriction of diving depth, it is not possible to exclude completely the occurrence of diving-related illness such as barotrauma, decompression sickness, immersion pulmonary edema or (near-)drowning, the provision for a medical first aid and evacuation plan remains mandatory for all diving. This kind of emergency planning is likely to be compromised during the current conditions of (self-) isolation and personal protection, as well as by the scarcity of (para-) medical resources.

Finally, the decreased availability of hyperbaric chambers for treatment of diving-specific illnesses poses a significant threat to the proper treatment of these conditions.

Therefore, the European Underwater and Baromedical Society (EUBS), in concert with the European Committee for Hyperbaric Medicine (ECHM), recommends:

1. That **all recreational diving activities**, either solo or in buddy pairs, **should be suspended** for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. That **all recreational diving medical examinations**, as these are considered “non-urgent” and “not medically essential”, **should be postponed** until a later date. Medical examinations by necessity impose a close personal contact between the physician and the diver, which is incompatible with the current recommendations of interpersonal distance. Diving federations requiring a diving medical examination should consider providing interim guidance e.g. by prolonging the validity of the current medical certificate.
3. The continuation of **diving activity and medical examinations for professional divers are the responsibility of the Employer after careful risk analysis**, taking into account any advice from national regulatory bodies, the urgency of the diving activity and the possibility to provide proper medical care in case of diving-related disease or injury. This may mean that in some areas diving activities should be postponed unless such “guarantee of care” can be given without making use of public health care.

In case of any doubts, please contact the EUBS (www.eubs.org) or ECHM (www.ECHM.org).

Recommendations issued on **26th March 2020**.

On behalf of the EUBS:

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On behalf of the ECHM:

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