Sport climbing facilities re-opening proposal

This proposal is made on behalf of the South African National Climbing Federation, its provincial members and the climbing centres and private training facilities.
The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a National State of Disaster on the 15th of March 2020, under Government Gazette No 43096 by Cabinet. Therefore, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, was mandated to issue regulations on the 18th of March 2020, in terms of Section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act 57 of 2002) regarding steps necessary to prevent an escalation of the disaster or to alleviate, contain and minimise the effects of the pandemic (disaster).

On the 23rd of March 2020, the President of the Republic of South Africa, during his national address, announced extra-ordinary measures to curb and contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic which included an initial 21 day lockdown period. The lockdown period was initially extended to the 30th of April 2020 and thereafter lowered to Level 4.

In terms of the regulations, Sport is not listed as a separate Sector, despite this being a critical important industry for South Africa’s economic welfare and its people’s well-being. Its importance cannot be underplayed as in the words of former President Nelson Mandela;

“Sport has the power to change the world; it has the power to inspire; it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than government in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.”

Moving forward in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the re-introduction of selected sport must be considered because it will provide a great emotional and psychological support, hope for some, and a source of income for many.
B. COVID-19 and Preventing Transmission at Sport Climbing Facilities

Taking into account the recommendations of international and national health authorities, as well as current studies and scientific findings, concrete hygiene measures will be followed at all the facilities to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

The information available to date on the epidemiology of COVID-19 demonstrates that transmission occurs particularly in close (e.g. domestic or medical care), unprotected contact between people. According to current knowledge, transmission occurs predominantly via respiratory secretions, primarily droplets, for example when coughing and sneezing.\(^1\) Droplet infection can occur when droplets produced when coughing and sneezing are absorbed by the opposite person through the mucous membranes of the nose, mouth and possibly the eye.\(^2\)

The wearing of additional mouth protection can significantly reduce the spread of aerosol containing coronavirus RNA.

The risk of transmission through contaminated surfaces could be considered very low, but cannot be excluded if in the immediate vicinity of an infected person. Despite the low risk of infection via surfaces when hygiene practices are followed, new findings must be continuously checked and evaluated. Detached from the scientific facts, it is possible that people remain afraid of infection via climbing holds. These fears and worries must be taken into account, specifically addressed, and possibly refuted.

Hand hygiene is one of the most important measures in preventing the spread of this disease. Immediately after entering a sport climbing facility, customers’ hands will be sprayed with alcohol-based hand sanitiser, and again before their climbing starts, either by themselves or employees, in the cases of commercial facilities. Customers should wash their hands properly and regularly during their visit according to generally recommended instructions. After using water and soap, disposable paper towels will be available to dry the hands and will then be disposed of in a specifically provided waste bin including bin liner.

Masks are already compulsory on a national scale, and the wearing of masks should help prevent the spread of the virus. Inside the centre, and in the centre’s general vicinity, in addition to observing the distance regulation, it should be obligatory to cover mouth and nose appropriately when other people are nearby.

Multilayer medical mouth-nose protection (MNS) is suitable for hindering the release of pathogen-containing droplets of the wearer and serves primarily to protect the other person (foreign protection). At the same time, it can protect the wearer from absorbing droplets or splashes via mouth or nose, e.g. from the opposite person (self-protection). Various studies have also shown that the spread of aerosol containing coronavirus RNA into the ambient air could be prevented by face masks.

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\(^1\) Robert Koch Institut, 14.04.2020: Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 - Empfehlungen des RKI zu Hygienemaßnahmen im Rahmen der Behandlung und Pflege von Patienten mit einer Infektion durch SARS-CoV-2

C. Sport Climbing

Sport Climbing is both a recreational and competitive sport for people of all ages and genders. Some of the recreational side is also competitive, as the climber works to complete a specific route or boulder, challenging themselves, but not another person.

Within competition climbing, the climbers compete against other climbers of the same age groups and gender. Additionally, children take part in “fun” competitions from the age of 5-10 years. While these are not true “competitions” they allow these children to begin skills building. Age groups range from Youth age groups to the Masters category.

Competition Sport Climbing, is administered by the South African National Climbing Federation (SANCF) which is a Federation in good standing with SASCOC and the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC).

1. Indoor Sport Climbing Centres

The South African National Climbing Federation and relevant climbing facilities would urge that Climbers be permitted to climb indoors with certain protocols, rules and regulations being put in place.

In South Africa there are essentially four types of indoor climbing facilities, namely;

a. Private Commercial centres with a retail component with membership and “walk-in” public customers. People use these facilities to climb, take part in training courses and clinics or to host children's birthday parties;

b. Private training centres with membership based on access by appointment;

c. School and University sport climbing facilities with access only permitted through “student cards” or controlled access by administrators;

d. Private home “walls” for families and close friends;

There are 4 types of indoor climbing practices/styles (plus possibly pilates and yoga sessions) namely;

a. Bouldering – On +- 4m high “boulders” with no rope and a safe landing mat (similar to high jump or pole vault mats);

b. Top Rope – A sport climbing centre rope secured at the top of the route, through certified attachments, with a belay device, on the one end for the belayer to use and the other end for the climber to “tie” into their private harness using a figure of 8 rope knot. This is generally used for children's parties and “beginners”;

c. Lead – The climbers use their own rope secured with a belay device, on the one end for the belayer to use and the other end for the climber to “tie” into their private harness using a figure of 8 rope knot. The Climber will clip into quickdraws or perma-draws clipped to the bolted hanger. (Centre’s ropes not recommended);
d. Auto-belayer device – A climber attaches the centre’s carabiner, permanently secured onto the Auto-belayer, onto their climbing harness, with the Auto-Belayer securely attached at the top of the wall/route.

Each "style" will require a different cleaning and distancing protocol.

2. Effect of COVID-19 Lockdown on Sport Climbing

   a. Currently the effect of the Lockdown on athletes training, competitions, and business, whilst needed has been austere;

   b. The African Continental Championship, the Sport Climbing IFSC Olympic qualifier (originally scheduled to take place in Cape Town in March) was postponed in addition to a number of Provincial competitions;

   c. Sport Climbing Centres have been closed which has prevented athletes training and individuals climbing;

   d. Businesses and private coaches' source of income has ceased;

   e. 1000s of South African climbers are affected.

3. Facilities Re-opening Protocol

   We are acutely aware of the dangers of the COVID-19 Pandemic if not controlled. We understand and support the rationale behind the regulations and Lockdown, and as we are a relatively new SACOC Member Federation, since 30 September 2013, we propose to table a Re-opening Protocol for Sport Climbing which involves adapting past practices to ensure we are able to safely continue to operate safely going forward.

   Surfaces in the facility (except for climbing walls) will be cleaned regularly throughout the day with damp and certified disinfectant cleaning agent. The boulder mats will also be damp-cleaned. Areas or objects that are touched particularly frequently (excluding climbing holds), such as door handles, counter surfaces at check-in, must be cleaned hourly with a surface disinfectant.

   If all other risk-minimising measures (including compensation measures) are observed and all scientific findings on the transmission paths are taken into account, regular disinfection of climbing holds should be avoidable. Climbing holds also have a rough and dry surface which is not a hospitable environment for the virus and with regular hand sanitising of climbers, the likelihood of transmission via climbing hold is even lower.

   In general, human corona viruses are not particularly stable on dry surfaces. The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) in Germany, is not aware of any infections with SARS-CoV-2 through contact with surfaces. In principle, corona viruses can get onto surfaces through direct sneezing or coughing of an infected person and survive only briefly. A smear infection of another person appears possible if the virus is transmitted shortly afterwards via the hands to the mucous membranes of the mouth and throat or the eyes. To protect yourself from virus transmission via contaminated surfaces, it is important to observe the general rules of everyday hygiene, such as washing your hands regularly and keeping your hands away from your face. ³

³ Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung, 16.04.2020: Kann das neuartige Coronavirus über Lebensmittel und Gegenstände übertragen werden?
a. General Policies (Slight adaption for Commercial and Private Training facilities and schools and personal home walls).

a. Access – Members only i.e. no new climbers.
   I. No physical cash will be accepted, i.e. only cards and other contactless payment systems may be used unless membership/coaching fees are paid in advance;
   II. All facility entrants’ names and contact details are to be documented and information retained in the event tracing of individuals is needed. This includes all persons, owners, management, staff and customers/members;
   III. No entry will be permitted to anyone unless “fever free” – under 37.3C. All entrants, on registering, will have their temperatures measured and the general health condition of each individual will be ascertained as required by general government standards;
   IV. Anyone who is sick, or feeling sick will not be admitted. If symptoms (fever, cough, breathing difficulties) occur, one should not enter the facility;
   V. Hand washing or hand sanitiser must be used upon entry and exit from the centre;
   VI. Limit the number of entrants based on a per person per 2m² basis and the size of the establishment;
   VII. All entrants are to leave their street shoes in the lobby/prescribed area on entry.
   VIII. All personal climbing equipment i.e. harnesses and climbing shoes etc. must be sprayed. If shoes/slippers are permitted, they must be a separate pair brought specifically for indoor wear only and must also be sanitised;
   IX. Entrants must each have their own water bottle, which will be required to be sanitised
on entry and **will not** be permitted to be refilled at the communal water fountain.

X. 500ml still water bottles will be available to be purchased and will be wiped down/sanitised before being given to the purchaser.

XI. Access will only be given;

a. By appointment through the development of “timeslots” for the use of the facilities for a reduced number of visitors. Customers are offered short time slots, e.g. 90 minutes, in which they may sport climb. Availability can be viewed and booked in advance;

b. If the climber/s pass the COVID-19 entry screening;

c. If the numbers inside are lower than the prescribed numbers as determined in point 4a.a.v1 above;

d. For an agreed time depending on the facility i.e. either 1 hr, 1 ½ hour or 2 hrs per individual;

e. Certified Masks can be purchased at the facility, if the mask the customer is wearing is not of a suitable standard and quality;

f. If the climber/s have their own equipment, shoes, ropes, liquid chalk, belay devices and masks (refer 4.a.a.e. above) as **NO HIRE EQUIPMENT WILL BE RENTED OUT**, until Level 1 is reached (at this point there may be different cleaning/renting protocols introduced).

b. Masks are mandatory for all employees – Company masks are to be changed every 3 hours and washed every day;

c. All entrants and staff are to maintain a minimum of 2m apart at all times, refer to C.a.ii. below;

d. Regular employee and entrants use of hand sanitiser prior to and after touching common use items and areas;

e. Documented sanitisation of high traffic areas at least every 2 hours:
   I. Entry and exit door handles
   II. All free hand contact points (bars, weights, etc) seats and benches
   III. All exercise machine contact points (bars, pins, handles, etc), seats, and benches
   IV. Entry
   V. Facility iPads
   VI. Keyboards
   VII. Computer mouse
   VIII. Counter tops
   IX. Microphones
   X. Vending machine
   XI. Light switches
   XII. Coffee stations
   XIII. Bathroom door handles, faucets, stall handles, and sinks
   XIV. Other.
b. Proactive Prevention Policies.

If there are any symptoms of the virus (fever, difficulty breathing, dry cough, and tiredness) experienced by any employee and customer, the individual/group will;


b. If you do not have a test to determine if you are affected and contagious, you may return after all three of these things have happened;
   I. You have had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without fever reducing medication);
   II. Other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved);
   III. At least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared.

c. If you are tested to determine if you are affected and contagious, you may return after all of the following three have occurred:
   I. You no longer have a fever (without the use of medication that reduces fevers);
   II. Other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved);
   III. You have received two negative tests in a row. Your doctor will follow Health Department’s guidelines.

d. Ablution facilities will be required to be cleaned and sanitised regularly by the centre employee and until Level 1 is reached. No showers will be permitted to be used.

c. Climbing practice/policies

Where and when possible, open ventilation will be provided (open doors and/or windows).

Each different type of facility and climbing style will need to have approved policies to specifically “fit” in based on the size and type of the facility, but the following minimum procedures need to be adhered to;

a. All facilities, excluding private home walls;
   I. Time slots will be required for each entrant/pair/household group to climb or boulder in certain areas in the facility;
   II. Each area of the facility will be required to be “taped” off to ensure that there is a clear distance between the pair of climbers, unless the group are all from the same household with no more than 4 persons at a time, with a minimum of 4 metres measured horizontally;
   III. Only liquid climbing chalk will be permitted to be used;
   IV. All climbers, belayers, spotters and coaches are to wear masks whilst climbing or coaching;
   V. Top Rope Climbers are to bring their own belay devices to tie in to the centre’s ropes;
   VI. Lead Climbers are to bring in their own ropes to climb (Refer A.i.9.d above);
VII. After each climb is complete, the belay device is to be sanitised before passing onto the “partner”;

VIII. The Auto-Belay Carabiner will be wiped down after each climber has finished climbing with the approved sanitising wipes provided by the facility at each Auto-Belay station;

IX. Climbing impact mats will be routinely sanitised;

b. Sanitisation between bookings;

I. The climbers, on exiting a reserved area, will practice good hygiene and ensure that the area is sanitised and free of their personal equipment;

II. All used paper towels etc. are to be thrown in the closest bin with a disposable bin liner and no lid;

III. A dedicated facility employee will also wipe down areas regularly;

IV. A minimum of 15 minutes between bookings is to be observed to ensure there is time to clean an area.

c. Age Groups, Youth Camps and “Kiddies parties”

There is often a sense of “controlled” mayhem when youngsters come into the facility for either a Birthday Party, as a group, or individuals with family members coming to climb. The colours and sheer excitement of the facility, the walls and the routes make social distancing almost impossible to manage with very young children.

Although this is a lucrative income stream for a climbing centre, it needs to be carefully considered as to how this is managed and at what Level these activities will resume.

It may mean, “children only” periods at Levels 1 & 2 only.

d. Should the private home walls be permitted to be open, and to have friends train on these walls, then the wall owner is still required to practice social distancing and hygiene protocols.

Annexures

A: SANCF Resolution
B: Facility Cleaning protocol
C: Posters
D: Industry Support letter
E: Sport Climbing centre retail centre procedures

We are able to make a formal presentation and request that all enquiries be forwarded to George Stainton : email secretarial@sancf.org : Cell +27 (0) 82 775 0887

End
Annexure A: SANCF Resolution

SANCF Resolution

On the 13 May 2020 at a General Meeting, held via a Go-TO Meeting call at 18h00, the SANCF MANCO and all five Member Provinces of the South African National Climbing Federation (SANCF) unanimously resolved the following:

"That George Stainton as the elected SANCF Secretary together with Neil Cosser as the elected SANCF Corporate Governance Representative, lead the "Return to Climb" Submission together with all the various South African Climbing Centres and submit it formally to both SASCOC and the Department of Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation by 15 May 2020.

President

Tracy Potgieter

Vice-President

Fem Steenkamp

Secretary

George Stainton

Corporate Governance

Neil Cosser

Treasurer

Sylvia Ravenscroft

Athlete Representative

Calrin Curtis

SANCF - 15 May 2020
Annexure B: Facility Cleaning protocol

IN THE EVENT OF A PERSON FEELING ILL ON THE PREMISES

Should any person begin to experience symptoms they are requested to go to the quarantine area immediately and to touch as little as possible on their way there. From where they should immediately notify management.

Should the person be incapacitated, medical assistance should be called and the immediate area cleared of all persons to fire assembly point for further instructions.

They should remain there and await the assigned manager so that a debrief can be undertaken to establish the extent of any possible exposure for the purposes of establishing the extent of any decontamination.

Where the person has no means of transport or is to unwell to drive, arrangements will be made by the company to either take them home or to the closest testing station.

This will either be by using a Company vehicle or their private vehicle. If company vehicle is used it must be sanitized afterwards. Driver must wear mask at all times. After testing the person to self-isolate until test results are available. If negative person needs to see his general practitioner and will only be allowed back once recovered.

If positive person to self-isolate until such time that he/she has fully recovered and is cleared by a medical practitioner. Employee to keep Company informed of status at all times. Normal sick leave will be utilised during the recovery time. In the event were insufficient sick leave is available this will be discussed on a case by case scenario by HR.

Areas visited by the possible infected person must be disinfected immediately. Normal incident investigation procedure will be followed after a positive case is reported in the workplace.

It is not required at this stage for company to be closed again. Employees to be informed of infected colleagues and requested to monitor for any symptoms vigilantly. Should any symptoms surface employee to inform the company immediately and get tested.

ENHANCED CLEANING AND DISINFECTION AFTER NOTIFICATION OF A CONFIRMED CASE OF COVID-19

This protocol is for sanitising and disinfection of areas where a person with COVID-19 spent time in the work/facility area or other areas under the control of the climbing centre.

After notification that a person with confirmed COVID-19 was present at work/facility or other areas under the control of the climbing centre, the following cleaning and disinfecting protocol will be followed:
• Buildings and/or specific rooms and areas where a COVID-19 positive person spent time will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The disinfecting scope will be implemented based on the risk of potential contamination as determined by the management.

• Management will do the following (as applicable):
  › Communicate in writing the scope of disinfecting of Facilities to the person responsible for disinfecting.
  › Identify areas that require restricted access during and immediately following enhanced cleaning.

• When disinfecting rooms with increased surface area due to tables, and other furniture, and where a spray application of disinfectant is needed, the disinfecting staff will notify the responsible person in advance if spraying will occur during normal work hours. Advance notice allows the building occupants to be apprised of the schedule for disinfection of the space and any areas that may require restricted access during cleaning.

• The disinfecting staff will:
  › Follow the Enhanced Cleaning for Prevention guidance outlined in this document.
  › Open windows to the outside to increase air circulation, if possible.
  › If an outside contractor is used for cleaning and disinfection, the proposed scope of work, including the products and their respective material safety data sheets (MSDSs), and application methods must be reviewed by the health and safety staff prior to work commencing.

• Required personal protective equipment (PPE) will be worn during cleaning and disinfecting:
  › Disposable gloves, gowns or a lab coat to protect contamination of clothing.
  › Safety glasses/goggles when there is a potential for splashing/spraying the disinfectant.
  › All staff must be fully trained on donning and doffing required PPE to prevent cross contamination.

• Management will in conjunction with the disinfecting staff review the COVID-19 Chemical Disinfectant Safety Information guide to identify potential health hazards and the recommended protective measures for common active disinfectant agents.

• Disinfectant to be used:
  › Effective – ready to use broad spectrum virucidal, bactericidal, fungicidal & tuberculocidal.
  › Heavy duty – one step hospital disinfectant, cleaner & deodorizer with short contact times.
  › Low toxicity – category IV with no cautions or warnings.
  › Multi surface friendly – leaves no residue and requires no rinsing or wiping.
  › Effective, safe hand sanitizer.

Thank you for the opportunity

Ronelle du Toit
Pest Control Technologies (Pty) Ltd
Annexure C: Posters

COVID-19 climbing centre policies

- Appointment only - Limited entry
- Sanitise your hands before entering the centre.
- Wear a cover over your nose and mouth.
- Leave street shoes at the entrance. Sanitise all personal climbing equipment.
- Complete the compulsory register.
- Refrain from touching things unnecessarily. Only personal gear to be used.
- Stay 2m apart from anyone you don't live with.
- Liquid chalk only.

Please do not visit any climbing centre if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in contact with anyone with COVID-19.
COVID-19 store policies

- Wear a cover over your nose and mouth.
- Sanitise your hands before entering the shop.
- Complete the compulsory register.
- Refrain from touching things unnecessarily.
- Pay with a card or order online.
- Only 5 customers are allowed in the shop at any given time.

Please do not visit our gear stores if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in contact with anyone with COVID-19. You may order online and have your order delivered to you if that is the case.
Annexure D:

Industry Support Letter from the Managing Director of a Significant Industry Player, Robert Breyer: CityROCK Indoor Climbing Centre

Dear SASCOC/Minister of Sport,

Indoor climbing venues all over SA should reopen as soon as possible. We believe we can safely do so under the existing Level 4 restrictions.

Together with SANCf, CityROCK have developed a COVID-19 ‘safe climbing’ management plan. This is based on local experience and best international practices.

1. We are not a contact sport.

   Indoor climbing is essentially practiced by one person, on a wall. It is between the climber and the wall. So the sport can be practiced safely with minimal human contact.

2. The sport of climbing involves risk management (due to the height aspect). But climbing facilities all over the world have learnt how to manage these risks through very strict operational safety procedures. So, our staff and customers alike are used to strict rules. Our staff will be able to do their jobs and customers will be able to practice their sport while obeying our COVID-19 operational procedures.

3. All our facilities are well ventilated.

4. Our facilities are very large, the largest being 4,000 m². So social distancing is not difficult to implement. In the case of CityROCK, we can expect a maximum of 50 customers at any one point in time that means 4,000 / 50 = 90 m² PER PERSON.

5. We are a small employer, but every employee we can retain is one less unemployed person in a struggling economy. There are more than 15 facilities in SA, our two facilities alone employ 116, not including casual staff members freelance instructors.

6. We are a provider of fun. At times like these, fun is really key for keeping people sane.

7. Indoor climbing is now an Olympic sport. In addition to being the host venue for the (now postponed) Africa Continental Championships, our facilities remain the training venue for South Africa’s Olympic climbers. The 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo have been postponed to mid-2021. But if our athletes stand a chance on the world stage, then their training cannot be put on hold any longer.

8. We work on a membership basis. Where every member has an account. This means we can easily limit access and numbers too. Contact tracing is very easy for us, in case we need to go there.

Finally, some of our facilities have been in business for almost two decades and these few months of lockdown could be the end of viable sport climbing facilities in South Africa if we cannot resume operations soon.

Robert Breyer
Managing Director CityROCK
Annexure E:

Sport Climbing Retail shops access.

I. This will differ depending on public or only members access to the retail section;

II. There will need to be controlled access and sanitisation measures put in place including, but not limited to the following;
   a. Wearing of masks and social distancing practices to be observed;
   b. A maximum of two customers at a time in the case of those from a single household;
   c. Hand sanitisation to be practiced upon entrance;
   d. No bags etc. are to be brought in i.e. only wallet, keys and cell phone;
   e. A dedicated shop assistant will manage the visit;
   f. All merchandise is to be handled by the assistant.