
SAFETY RULES & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORIENTEERING

Safety rules of orienteering events

1. **Strictly observe all event specific rules, cautions and advice from event staff.**
2. **Carry a whistle. You are required to blow on the whistle if you get injured or seriously lost. The emergency signal is three blasts at 10 second intervals, repeated every two minutes.**
3. **Try to find the hurt or lost competitor if you hear a distress whistle. You must abandon your course if you hear a distress whistle and help participants in need.**
4. **Always return to registration at the end of the event even if you haven't finished the course. If your name isn't checked off, the organisers will assume you are still somewhere on the course.**

Safety recommendations while on a course in case of injury or becoming lost:

- Stop immediately if you become injured. Running 'through the pain' will only make your injury worse. Try to return to the start area.
- Stop and relocate if uncertain of your location, (track back to the last point that you were certain about your location). Choose a safer route or return to start.
- If you are unable to return it is recommended that you stay still and blow the distress call (three whistle blow) until help arrives.
- Only blow the whistle if you are lost, injured or too exhausted to continue.
- Seek prompt medical treatment for all injuries. Do not resume activity until you have completely recovered from injury.
- Consider getting basic first aid training. You may be the first person to make contact with an injured orienteer.
- In case of an overdue person, the organizers will initiate a search. You can help by listening to and following the direction of the organizers. The need to act as a coordinated team rather than as individuals cannot be overemphasized.

Possible risks and injuries

- Tripping and falling - impact injuries
- Acute running injuries –strains, sprains and blisters
- Overuse injuries – although orienteers mostly run on soil rather than concrete, they may still be vulnerable to overuse injuries such as shin splints
- Skin and eye injuries – including abrasions, cuts, bruises, insect bites and sunburn.
- Extreme weather: hypothermia, heat stroke, dehydration
- Natural disasters: lightning, floods, wildfire
- Animal encounters
- Becoming lost: disorientation and exhaustion
- Other unforeseen situations

Some of the factors that can increase your risk of injury include:

- Inexperience – beginners who are unaccustomed to reading maps and using a compass may trip and fall or become lost more easily, particularly if they choose a course that’s beyond their skill and experience level.
- Lack of appropriate clothing and shoes – neglecting to wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt and long pants, can result in injuries to the skin such as scratches from tree branches or thorny plants.
- Lack of physical conditioning – orienteers should be sure they have adequate physical conditioning to handle their activity level.
- Poor technique – for example, an incorrect running technique can place excessive strain on joints and muscles.
- Losing alertness of your surrounding.

Recommendations to prevent injuries:

- Choose the activity based on a realistic assessment of your ability: newcomers should start with a beginners’ course and progress gradually to more advanced courses, to stay within their comfort level
- To avoid tripping and falling, look up from the map, familiarize yourself with the terrain before you start running. Adjust your running speed to terrain difficulty. Practice reading map while running in terrain.
- Wear appropriate clothes to cover skin and consider wearing eye protection. Make sure your shoes are comfortable and give good support. Don’t buy a new pair of shoes and try to ‘break them in’ during an orienteering event.
- Adjust to weather conditions by dressing suitably for the temperature and weather. Drink plenty of water before, during and after the event to reduce the risk of dehydration. In case of overheating find shade and stop and rest; cool your body with wet clothes.
- Warm up thoroughly before orienteering. Include plenty of before and after stretches.
- Exercise regularly to keep yourself in adequate physical condition for your activity.

- In case of sudden bad weather (stormy weather) return to start.
- In case of heavy rain stay above river beds, dry rock beds and steep hills to stay safe from flash floods, flooding or mud slides.
- In case of a thunderstorm, avoid high places and avoid large open spaces. If thunder is heard or lightning is seen it is best to head to shelter (e.g. your car). If that is not possible, find low ground, crouch down and minimize your surface area in contact with the ground (e.g. find a depression, crouch down, body tucked in a ball, resting on the balls of your feet). Avoid lone trees and rocky outcrops or ledges.
- In wildfire situation: try to leave the area moving away from the fire. Choose a downhill route (but stay out of canyons) to avoid smoke and be aware of wind direction which may blow the fire and smoke towards you. If fire is coming near, try to find a wet marsh or lake and stay in the water. If no water body is nearby go to an area clear of vegetation (or already burnt down), a ditch or depression, lie face down, and cover your body with dirt.
- Tips for not getting lost: Keep in mind that the most direct route is often the hardest. Study the map carefully and choose the most appropriate route for your skill and fitness level. Wear a watch to keep track of time and monitor your exhaustion level. Keep your map inside a waterproof bag. Observe the items listed in the 'legend' on your map, as this will provide important information about the terrain, features and potential hazards on the course.
- Stay alert of your surrounding.
- Animal encounters: refer to the WildSmart website for more educational materials and videos as listed below.

Safety recommendations regarding encounters with wildlife

Precaution and pre-planning are the best ways to avoid an unwanted encounter with wildlife. First, check for [trail closures and warnings](#) while planning your activities. Second, learn how to avoid encounters and how to recognize signs of bears and other wildlife.

AOA recommendation for events in bear country:

For all AOA sanctioned events and all AOA affiliated member clubs' events which are held in bear country (designated by map location) and or in an area that has a bear warning in effect:

- Participants 18 years and older recommended to carry bear spray at all times when participating in any orienteering activities alone.
- Participants between age of 12-18y either recommended to carry a bear spray or recommended to be accompanied by someone else who has a bear spray with them.
- Youth under 12 years of age recommended to shadowed by an adult who is carrying bear spray with them.
- All participants who carry bear spray must know how to use it.
- **To learn more about bear encounters and how to use a bear spray visit the website below:**
<http://www.wildsmart.ca/index.htm>

Summary about how you can avoid encounters:

- Respecting all trail closures and warnings.
- **Always carry bear spray and know how to use it.**
- Traveling in groups whenever possible.
- Making lots of noise and being aware of your surroundings.
- Leaving the area if you see or smell a dead animal
- Having your dog on a leash unless in a designated off-leash area.
- Supervising small children at all times

Additional Information about how you can avoid encounters:

Handling a COUGAR ENCOUNTER

- Immediately pick up children and pets.
- Do not turn your back on a cougar; maintain eye contact with the cougar.
- Always leave room for it to escape.
- NEVER RUN; it may trigger an attack. Back away slowly.
- Make yourself appear as large as possible.

Handling a COUGAR ATTACK

- Fight back with anything at hand.
- Use bear spray (keep canisters easily accessible and warm in winter to improve effectiveness).

Handling BEAR ENCOUNTER

- Most encounters with bears end without injury. If the bear is unaware of your presence leave the area in the direction you came.
- If the bear is aware of your presence and does not leave, be non-threatening: speak calmly, don't yell. Stay calm and back away slowly – DON'T RUN.
- If the bear closes distance on you, even after you have tried to retreat, such behavior could be considered curious, indifferent or predatory.
- If the bear continues closing distance – make yourself large, stand your ground and talk firmly to the bear.

Handling a BEAR ATTACK

- You may increase your chance of survival by following these guidelines. In general, there are 2 kinds of attacks:

1. Defensive Attack

- The bear is protecting a carcass, protecting its young and/or is surprised by your presence. It attacks because you are perceived as a threat. Remember bears will often bluff charge.
- **Be non-threatening – don't run or yell. Stay calm and back away slowly.**
- Use your bear spray.
- If the bear makes contact with you: PLAY DEAD!
- Drop to the ground face down, interlace your fingers over the back of your neck and spread your legs to make it more difficult for the bear to turn you over. By playing dead the bear will likely lose interest in you and leave. Defensive attacks are generally less than two minutes in duration.

If the attack continues, it may mean the attack has shifted from defensive to non-defensive (i.e. predatory) - in this case fight back!

2. Non- defensive Attack

- The bear is aware of your presence, has time to leave but continues closing distance on you – even after you have tried to retreat. This behaviour could be considered curious, indifferent or predatory.
- Use your bear spray. **DO NOT PLAY DEAD! FIGHT BACK!**
- Intimidate the bear: shout; hit it with a branch or rock, do whatever it takes to let the bear know you are not easy prey.

Handling an ELK ENCOUNTER

- Elk can be dangerous. Female elk can be especially aggressive during the May - June calving season. Male elk can be especially aggressive during the September - October breeding season.
- If the animal is responding to your presence you are too close.
- Give them plenty of room. Keep at a distance of at least 3 bus lengths.
- Do not approach elk or their calves.

Handling an ELK ATTACK

- If you are charged by an elk, position yourself behind a solid structure such as a tree or car.
- If you have bear spray consider using it.

Recommended educational information about living with wildlife:

WildSmart website: <http://www.wildsmart.ca/learn.htm>

Downloadable PDF: http://www.albertaparks.ca/media/2777016/web_living_wildlife_pamphlet.pdf

Document References:

- *Orienteering Canada:*
[APPENDIX "A" - GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PERSONAL SAFETY IN ORIENTEERING](#)
- *Victoria State Government: Orienteering - preventing injury*
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/orienteering-preventing-injury>
- *WildSmart educational materials:*
<http://www.wildsmart.ca/learn.htm>
http://www.albertaparks.ca/media/2777016/web_living_wildlife_pamphlet.pdf