



Country Park

Hiking Safety
Guidelines



漁農自然護理署
Agriculture, Fisheries and
Conservation Department

1 Introduction

Countryside Code

Do not vandalize natural features

Do not light fire except in barbecue areas and campsites

Do not cycle outside designated mountain bike trails

Do not pollute water

Do not litter

Do not destroy vegetation, wildlife and their living environment

Do not feed wild animals

Do not excavate or disturb soil

Protect countryside and preserve natural landscapes

Respect other visitors and keep the noise down

Respect villagers and do not damage private properties, crops and livestock

- Some 40 per cent of Hong Kong's total land area has been designated as country parks and special areas for nature conservation, outdoor recreation and nature education.
- Country parks provide extensive hiking trails for leisure walks or hiking. To enjoy a safe hike, suitable preparations and training are essential.
- The safety guidelines and emergency measures in this booklet are only for reference. One should always refer to the updated countryside maps and other useful information when planning the trip.
- In case of accident, seek help immediately.



2 Hints

2.1 Safety

- Plan carefully and choose a regularly maintained path with clear directory signs, and familiarize yourself with the area to be trekked, including the escape routes, transportation information, locations of police stations, country park ranger offices, and emergency call telephones before setting out.
- Pay attention to the latest weather information issued by the Hong Kong Observatory before and during the activity. Change or cancel the activity if inclement weather is forecasted.
- Don't go hiking alone. It is preferable to go hiking in a group of at least four.
- Follow an experienced hiking leader who is familiar with the route. Ideally, for every ten members, one assistant leader with outdoor experience should offer assistance to the leader to coordinate the group.
- Make sure that there are members with first-aid knowledge in the group.
- Don't venture unmaintained paths or take shortcuts. Exploring new routes will put you in danger, or get lost.
- Don't walk, swim or play on natural streams, waterfalls or ponds.
- Sleep well before your excursions.
- Pay attention to your physical fitness and strength and avoid over-exhausted.
- If get lost in the mountain, retrace your steps along the original route. Don't force your way further and seek help immediately.

2.2 Hygiene and Health Tips

- Avoid hiking on days of very hot weather, high humidity, with no wind, bad or unstable weather, or when the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) in general station is serious.
- Personal belongings, such as towels and lip balm, should never be shared with others to avoid infectious diseases.
- Cover nose and mouth while sneezing or coughing with tissue paper, dispose of soiled tissue paper properly in a lidded rubbish bin.
- Always wash hands with liquid soap and water, or clean them with alcohol-based handrub before eating.
- Be considerate and keep the toilet clean after use.
- Don't spit or litter. Offenders will be prosecuted.
- Reduce litter production. Dispose your litter to major refuse collection point to avoid over-filling litter bins in the countryside.
- Apply insect repellent on clothes and the exposed skin to avoid mosquito and arthropod bites.
- Those who suffer from chronic illnesses such as heart disease and asthma are advised to consult the doctor before deciding if they should go hiking.

3 Planning Your Trip

■ Pay special attention to weather forecast and reports, especially the conditions listed below.

November to February	A sudden drop in temperature may lead to hypothermia. Low humidity may increase the risk of hill fire.
March to April	Hikers may get lost in foggy weather.
May to October	Thunderstorms, typhoons and heavy showers may trigger flooding, flash flood or landslide. High temperature may cause heat stroke and heat exhaustion.



■ Before setting out, the leader/hiker should leave the following details to a contact person such as friend, family, or the organizer of the event. In case of emergency or journey overdue, the information will be useful for mountain rescue.

- a. Nature, route and destination of the hike.
- b. Date and start time and the estimated finishing time of the hike.
- c. Number of participants and their names and ages.
- d. Contact phone number and address of the participant's family member.

■ Sleep well before the hike. Have a nutritious meal before setting out, especially for a long walk.

■ Put on suitable outfit and footwear; avoid wearing shorts and short-sleeved clothes. Bring along a walking stick and a cap that can ward off the sun in summer and keep you warm in winter.

■ Suitable spare clothing and basic necessities including maps, compass, ample of drinking water, food, torch, rain gear, radio, first-aid kit, whistle, fully charged mobile phone and backup battery, notebook and pen should be carried with your backpack.

■ A mobile phone can be the best means to make distress. Mountain ridges and valleys are usually the blind spots. Bring along backup battery and avoid unnecessary communication to save the battery power.



4 Points to Note Along the Way

- Follow the decisions and instructions of an experienced hiking leader. Don't leave your group halfway through the trip.
- Pay special attention to the way-marks and landforms to ensure that one is on the right track.
- Pay attention to the hazard warning signs erected along the route.
- Pay attention to mountain bikes when hiking at mountain bike trails.
- Pay attention to the physical fitness of the team members. Take suitable break for the whole team to ensure that no one is straggling behind or straying away.
- Watch out for any changes in your surrounding environment. Listen to the weather and news report so as to take early precautionary measures.
- In case of bad weather, one should consider shortening or curtailing the planned route.
- In case of emergency or journey overdue, inform the families of the participants or ask the contact person to relay your message.
- Don't deviate from the planned route indiscriminately or attempt to take any overgrown shortcuts or venture into bushes or forests. You may find yourself getting lost or stranded in a place where you can neither retreat nor proceed.
- Don't collect and eat wild fruit, mushroom or drink untreated stream water.
- To avoid hillfire, don't light fire or cook at any place other than designated barbecue sites and campsites. Offenders will be prosecuted.
- Don't stand at a cliff edge or climb onto rocks to take photos or view the scenery.

5 Possible Hazards during Excursions in Countryside

5.1 Hilly Paths

- Hikers sustain a fall easily when going down a hilly path. Wet rock surfaces, muddy paths and sandy or gravelly badlands pose similar hazards.

Safety Guidelines

- Wear ankle boots with corrugated soles for hiking.
- Bring a walking stick for use if necessary.
- If possible, avoid walking on wet rock surfaces, muddy paths and sandy or gravelly badlands.

Emergency Measures

- When someone has slipped and injured, check if he has any sprain, fracture, abrasion or other injuries. If necessary, give first aid.
- Fractures may be difficult to detect. If painful swelling occurs, curtail the planned journey.
- If the injured can walk, he should do so with the aid of a walking stick or with the support of other companions. He should, by no means, walk by himself as this would aggravate his injury.
- If the injured has a severe sprain or difficulty in walking, use mobile phone or send someone to seek help. Move the injured to a shady, dry and flat ground, cover him with clothing to keep him warm and wait for the rescue team.



5.2 Flash Flood

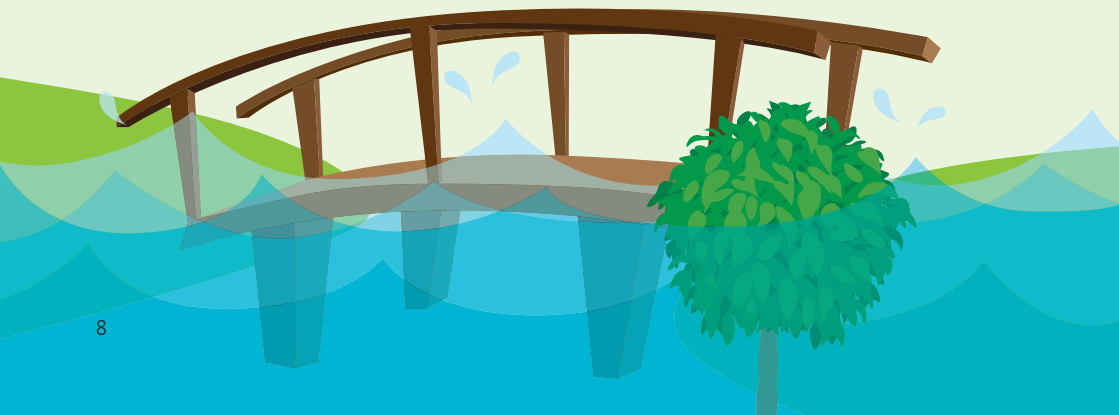
- The devastating power and speed of flash flood should never be underestimated. A stream may overflow and become raging torrents in heavy rain and wash away travelers, resulting in casualties within minutes.

Safety Guidelines

- Avoid hiking when the weather is bad or unstable, especially when the rainstorm warning signal is in force.
- Don't wade in the stream after heavy rain in summer.
- Don't hike, swim, jump or engage in other water sports along watercourse.
- Don't stay at the watercourse for taking rest, especially at its lower reaches.
- When it rains, leave the watercourse immediately and head for a high spot ashore.
- Never attempt to cross any inundated bridges. In case of heavy rain, leave the watercourse immediately.

Emergency Measures

- Rapid flows, turbid water with sand and mud are early signs of flash floods. Leave the watercourse immediately.
- If you fall into water, grip or hold onto the rocks, branches or vines near the banks, try to get ashore and leave the river course right away.



5.3 Landslide

- Landslides may occur when a large amount of rainwater has soaked a natural or artificial slope during a downpour or after days of heavy rain.

Safety Guidelines

- Avoid going near or staying around steep slopes during heavy rain or after a few days of heavy rain.
- The oozing out of a large quantity of muddy water from the base or the weep holes of a slope indicates that the slope is saturated with water. Exposure of inner soil and appearance of new cracks on the slope are early signs of a landslide. Keep away from such slopes.
- Don't proceed by stepping on loose mud if landslide blocks your way, retreat or seek another safe route to leave the scene immediately.

Emergency Measures

- Don't try to rescue accompany buried in a landslide. You should call for a fully equipped rescue team for help.



5.4 Hill fire

- Hill fire advances rapidly upward and windward on a grass slope in dry weather. Never underestimate its devastating power.

Safety Guidelines

- For the sake of safety, handle kindling materials with great care.
- Except at designated barbecue sites or campsites, never light a fire.
- Smokers should refrain from smoking during hiking and all cigarette-stubs or matches should be totally extinguished before being discarded into rubbish bins.
- Hill fire is difficult to detect in daytime. Always pay attention to flying ashes or the smell of something burning. If a hill fire is spotted, leave the fire scene immediately.
- Don't overlook the spreading speed of hill fire. Do not continue your journey in case of a fire nearby or you may get trapped in the fire.



Emergency Measures

- When there is a hill fire, stay calm.
- Never attempt to extinguish a hill fire indiscriminately, except that
 - a. the affected area is very small;
 - b. you are in a safe place; and
 - c. you can quickly evacuate from the fire scene.
- Evaluate the direction in which the fire spreads and avoid escaping in the same direction of the prevailing wind.
- Evaluate the gradient of the paths nearby and choose the one which is the easiest for escape.
- Find a place with less vegetation for escape.
- It is easier and quicker to escape through existing paths.
- If the fire is imminent and there is no way out, you should cover your exposed skin with wet clothing and then make way to the already burnt area. This can minimize the chance of getting injured. To conserve energy, never run uphill if the situation permits.
- Don't run into shrubs or grasslands, as fire usually spread rapidly and the temperature may soar in these areas.



5.5 Lightning Strikes

- Lightning normally strikes at the highest point of an object and the electric current is conducted to the ground via the least resistant path.
- Hikers attacked by lightning usually have the symptoms of muscle spasm, scalds, suffocation and cardiac arrest.

Safety Guidelines

- Take note of the latest weather information. Avoid hiking when the weather is unstable, especially when thunderstorm warning signal is in force.
- Wear shoes or boots with rubber soles in outdoor areas.
- Don't touch water or wet objects.

Emergency Measures

- Don't stand on hill tops or near any highly conductive objects. Keep away from trees and masts which are likely to be struck by lightning.
- Since lightning current is conducted away through the ground, you should not lie down especially when the ground is wet. Instead you should crouch down to minimize the area of contact between you and the ground.
- Stay away from iron fences or other metal installations, including antennae and water pipes. Remove all metal objects (e.g. gold ornaments, watch) from your body.
- Consider switching off the mobile phones.
- Seek shelter in buildings whenever possible.
- Don't swim or engage in other water sports.
- Don't touch any inflammable materials, such as kerosene or liquefied petroleum gas.
- Beware of intense gusts.



5.6 Getting Lost

- It is easy to get lost during bad weather or venture unplanned route.

Safety Guidelines

- Choose maintained paths with clear directory signs and plan your hiking route carefully.
- Stay tuned to weather report, and avoid hiking under adverse weather condition.
- Remember to bring all necessities including maps, compass, ample drinking water, food, torch, rain gear, radio, first-aid kit, whistle, mobile phone and backup battery, notebook and pen.

Emergency Measures

- Find your location with a compass and a map.
- Recall the route you have covered and retrace your steps to your original position. If this is not possible, stay and wait for rescue.
- To save your energy, don't proceed further.
- If you must advance further, take note of all the paths that you have tried.
- Avoid steep ravines as it is not easy to locate oneself in this topography. Head for a high spot if you fail to identify your location. It is easier to identify directions and to be discovered by the rescue team.
- In case cold weather sets in but you do not have sufficient warm protective clothing or if thunderstorm or hill fire occurs, leave the high spot until the situation improves and go back to the high spot again and wait for rescue.
- Give out International Mountain Distress Signals. (See P. 23)



5.7 Heat Stroke

- Heat stroke is caused by one's inability to regulate body temperature through transpiration at high ambient temperatures. The patient feels hot, dizzy, uneasy and even becomes unconscious. When the temperature exceeds 40°C, skin will become dry and flush; breath and pulse rate will increase. In some serious cases, the patient will suffer from shock. One shall lower the patient's body temperature and seek medical assistance.
- Overheat of the body will lead to heat exhaustion which usually occurs when one is engaging in sports in hot and humid weather, especially when one fails to replenish his body fluid and salt lost through sweating. The symptoms are exhaustion, headache, dizziness, nausea, muscle spasm, paleness, clammy skin, rapid but weak breath and pulse.

Safety Guidelines

- In summer months, plan a route which is shaded by trees. Leave more time for rest and don't plan a long journey.
- Avoid prolonged exposure to direct sunlight.
- Drink ample of water or mineral water.



Emergency Measures

- Move the patient to a cool shaded place. Remove his clothing and lay him down with feet elevated; give him drinks if he is conscious. Avoid the patient being surrounded by people.
- If necessary, apply other body-cooling techniques like immersion in water, wetting clothing and fanning until the symptoms disappear.
- Continue to replenish water and ask for help in order to rescue the patient as soon as possible.
- If the patient sweats heavily and convulse, serve him with salt water in the ratio of one tea spoon of salt to one liter of water.



5.8 Hypothermia

- It is caused by drop of body temperature due to lack of sufficient clothing in a cold place. Even in summer, rapid drop in temperature due to sudden cold rain or rainstorm will also cause hypothermia.
- Symptoms: fatigue, exhaustion, clammy skin, stumbling, shivering, muscle spasms, stammering and hallucinating.

Safety Guidelines

- Have a good sleep on the night before the hike.
- Don't go hiking if you are not feeling well.
- Have a nutritious meal before setting out. Take high energy food like chocolate during the trip.
- Bring warm protective and rain-proof clothing.
- Bring a spare set of clothes for change.
- Don't overload yourself with bulky object.
- Rest at intervals. Don't overstrain.

Emergency Measures

- Seek rain shelter and change wet clothes.
- Cover your head, face, neck and body with clothing or sleeping bag to keep warm.
- Take hot drinks and high energy food to maintain body temperature.

5.9 Snakebite

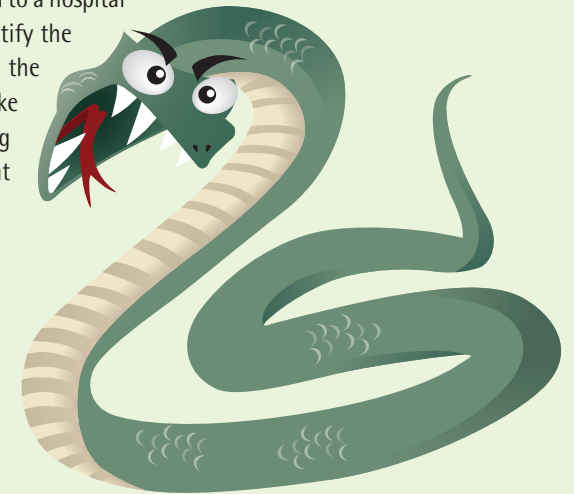
- Common venomous snakes in Hong Kong include Banded Krait, Many-banded Krait, King Cobra, Chinese Cobra and Bamboo Snake. They are more active in spring, summer and autumn.

Safety Guidelines

- Wear long trousers and ankle boots.
- Use maintained paths, never venture new paths and avoid hiking in dense woodlands or tall underbrush.

Emergency Measures

- If you see a snake, keep calm and stay still. Let the snake run away. Snakes have good eyesight. Irritation will lead to snake attack.
- In case of snakebite, please take the following measures:
 1. Don't cut, suck or wash the wound. Keep the injured lie down at rest. Don't elevate the wound or make unnecessary movement. Avoid alcoholic drinks.
 2. Whenever possible, use bandage to tie above the wound. Use a wide bandage if the wound is on arm or leg.
 3. Pacify the injured and rush him to a hospital for treatment. If possible, identify the type, colours and patterns of the venomous snake. If the snake has been caught, bring it along to the hospital so that the right antivenom can be used.



5.10 Bee Sting

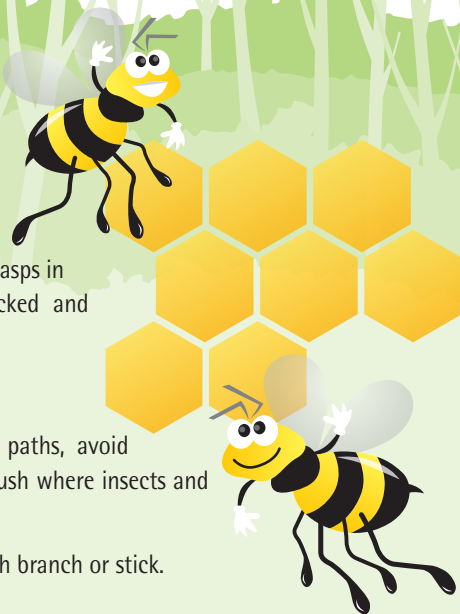
- Don't touch the combs of bees, hornets or wasps in countryside, this would avoid being attacked and stung by their swarm.

Safety Guidelines

- Use maintained trails. Don't venture new paths, avoid going into grass/fern bushes or tall underbrush where insects and wasps inhabit.
- Don't disturb combs. Never strike bushes with branch or stick.
- Avoid using aromatic body lotion.

Emergency Measures

- If there are only one or two bees/hornets/wasps hovering above, ignore them and keep going as usual.
- If there is a comb blocking the way, circumvent it and proceed.
- When attacked by a swarm of bees/hornets/wasps, squat still and cover your head and neck with outerwear for protection, or lie curled on the ground and evacuate slowly after the swarm has dispersed.
- If the sting is left in the wound, remove it with forceps. Don't squeeze the poisonous gland to prevent any residue poison from entering the body. You may apply a cold compress and apply it lightly to the wound to soothe the pain temporarily.
- Seek medical treatment if stung seriously.



5.11 Mosquito Bite

- Mosquitoes are common in the countryside. Mosquito bites cause temporary itching. However, one may be infected with dengue fever when being bitten by Aedine mosquitoes (*Aedes albopictus*) carrying dengue virus.
- Dengue fever is an acute mosquito-borne infection caused by the dengue viruses. It is transmitted to humans through the bites of infective female Aedine mosquitoes.

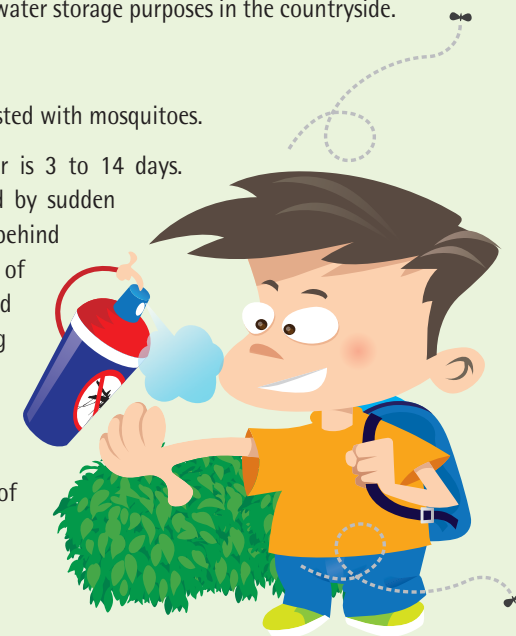
Safety Guidelines

- Wear loose, light-coloured long-sleeved tops and trousers, and apply DEET-containing insect repellent on clothing and exposed parts of the body.
- Avoid prolonged stay under tree, in grass bushes and hidden places.
- Don't dispose empty boxes, soft drink cans and plastic bags which can retain stagnant water.
- Don't store empty barrels or bottles for water storage purposes in the countryside.

Emergency Measures

- Stay away from the places that are infested with mosquitoes.
- The incubation period of dengue fever is 3 to 14 days. Dengue fever is clinically characterised by sudden onset of fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, joint and muscle pain, loss of appetite, nausea and rash. One should pay attention to the symptoms if being bitten by the Aedes mosquitoes and seek medical advice promptly for doubt.

For more details, please refer to the website of the Centre for Health Protection:
www.chp.gov.hk

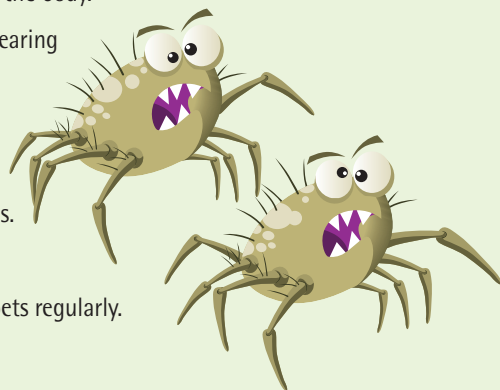


5.12 Mites and Ticks

- Some mites inhabiting the rural areas may carry vector borne diseases such as scrub typhus. Scrub typhus is infected through the bites of infected Trombiculid mites. Symptoms include fever, headache, muscle pain and punch-out skin ulcer (eschar) at the site of vector bite. To prevent vector bites, members of public should take preventive measures when going to rural areas.
- Tick-borne spotted fever is transmitted by ticks. Most larval ticks cluster at the tips of grasses or leaves and seek for their preferred animals or humans for sucking blood. Humans bitten by infective larval ticks may contract the disease.
- Precautionary measures should be taken at countryside to avoid being bitten by these vectors.

Safety Hints

- Wear loose, light-coloured long-sleeved tops and trousers and apply DEET-containing insect repellent on clothing and exposed parts of the body.
- Wear shoes that cover entire foot, avoid wearing sandals or open shoes.
- Avoid resting or lying inside scrubby areas.
- Don't hang clothing on vegetation.
- Avoid brushing the grasses beside the paths.
- Don't feed wild or stray animals.
- Inspect and disinfect your accompanying pets regularly.



Emergency Measures

- The incubation period for scrub typhus is commonly 10 to 12 days while that for tick-borne spotted fever is about 6 to 10 days. One should pay attention to the symptoms if being bitten and seek medical advice promptly for doubt.

For more details, please refer to the websites of Centre for Health Protection (www.chp.gov.hk) and Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (www.fehd.gov.hk).

5.13 Dangerous Plants

- Some common plants in the wilderness are harmful to hikers. For examples:
 - Wax Tree - skin allergy
 - Prickly Ash- scratches
 - Wild mushrooms/wild fruits – probably poisonous, can be fatal if consumed



Safety Hints

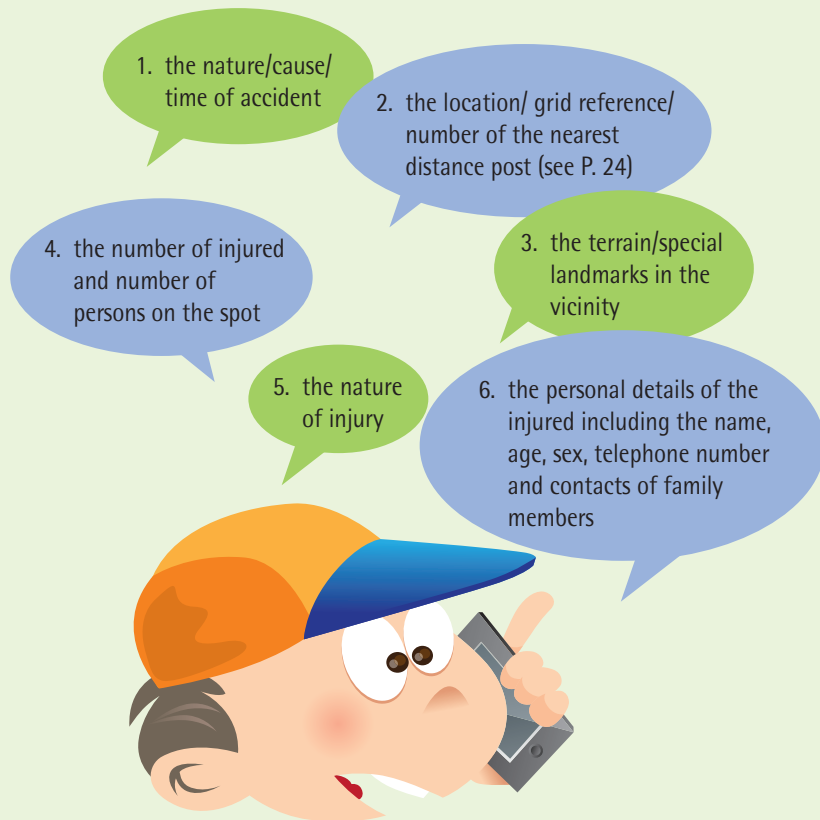
- Avoid going into dense bushes.
- Wear long-sleeved clothes and long trousers and bring a pair of gloves.
- Protect your head and face or exposed skins with handkerchief or clothing if you have to pass through a bush.
- Don't touch the Wax Tree.
- Beware of thorns when gripping on a plant.
- Don't attempt to eat wild fruits/mushrooms.

Emergency Measures

- Seek immediate medical treatment if skin allergy occurs after touching a plant or you are poisoned by wild fruits/mushrooms.

6 Distress Guide

- Give first aid to the injured as far as possible.
- Send out International Mountain Distress Signals (see P. 23) until the rescue team arrives.
- If possible, at least one member should look after the injured while the other two should go together to seek help.
- To facilitate rescue, the person who goes to seek help or call for help should write down the following essential information to ensure the accuracy of the distress message.



6.1 International Mountain Distress Signals

- Ways:
 - a. Send out six long blasts within one minute;
 - b. Pause for one minute;
 - c. Repeat a and b. Don't stop until the rescue team comes. Keep on giving out the signals even if the rescue team has discovered you from a far distance so that the rescuers can identify your exact position.
- Tools:



Morse Code Distress Signals

Sending out blasts in the sequence of three short, three long and three short.

SOS Distress Signal

If possible, use stones or tree branches to form the characters of SOS (Save Our Soul) on a flat and open space (Each character should be 6m x 6m).

6.2 Distance Post and “Your Location” Map Coordinate

- The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has erected distance posts at about 500m intervals along all long-distance hiking trails (MacLehose Trail, Lantau Trail, Hong Kong Trail and Wilson Trail) as well as all country trails for users to identify their location. In case of emergency, they can state their position by referring to the number on the nearby distance post or the coordinates marked at the location map, thus facilitating search and rescue operation.



Emergency call: 999 or 112

Telephone numbers of Country Park Ranger Offices/ Fire Control Centre

(Enquiry for hiking routes during office hours)

Useful Websites

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department:
www.afcd.gov.hk

Enjoy Hiking:
www.hiking.gov.hk

Office of the Communications Authority:
www.ofca.gov.hk

Hong Kong Observatory:
www.hko.gov.hk

Geoinfo Map:
www2.map.gov.hk/gih3/view/index.jsp

Centre for Health Protection:
www.chp.gov.hk

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department:
www.fehd.gov.hk



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