

Changes to IMRA mandatory kit procedure for races

As announced at the IMRA AGM, November 2023.

Background

For several years, standard practice has been that mandatory kit for IMRA races is a windproof/showerproof jacket at a minimum, with additional mandatory kit for certain races on a case by case basis. Typically this might involve map, compass, hat, gloves, food, water, waterproof full leg cover *etc.* and is broadly speaking decided on the remoteness *etc.* of the race. Problems with this practice have been:

- Little consistency between races & across leagues
- Race directors have struggled to make it clear what kit is required
- Competitors are often unclear about what they need to bring and occasionally turn up without necessary kit

The new guidelines have been designed to make things as easy as possible for RDs and competitors, getting rid of any confusion.

The system is essentially quite simple – each race will be assigned one of 3 levels of mandatory kit, clearly described on the race page. Runners should bring all that kit to the race. The actual kit to be carried by runners will be advertised on the day at registration.

3 levels of mandatory kit being introduced:

A. LOW LEVEL

Purpose: low level, low risk trail races

Mandatory kit, must be carried/worn by all runners throughout the race:

- Showerproof, windproof jacket

Rationale: The likelihood of anyone getting into trouble at these races is quite low. Nonetheless, it is good practice and consistent with current IMRA rules to have all runners carrying a jacket just in case they get injured or delayed on the course.

B. STANDARD

Purpose: Typical marked routes involving open mountain; one or more summits

The following kit should be brought to the race by all runners. The race director will advise on the day, by means of a display board at race sign-on, which kit must be brought out on the course. The RD will decide the mandatory kit based on factors including time of year, weather conditions & forecast, length and climb of course, remoteness of terrain *etc.*

- Waterproof jacket
- Hat or buff

- Gloves
- Whistle
- Charged mobile phone with emergency number stored
- Foil blanket, bivvy bag or equivalent

Rationale: The chances of a runner getting into serious difficulties in good conditions are relatively low, as courses are marked and typically not that long or visiting very remote terrain. However, in bad weather or visibility, the likelihood of issues arising goes up significantly. The additional kit (beyond the jacket) might not be needed in the majority of races, but all runners having the kit available allows the RD to make a sensible, proportionate call on the day. Some may feel the list is too onerous and might put potential runners off from trying the sport – IMRA's position is that we cannot simply send people out into the hills and mountains improperly equipped. We've had numerous races over the years where conditions are benign at the start/finish, but very different on the hill (cold, strong winds, poor visibility).

C. ADVANCED

Purpose: Unmarked routes involving open mountain, where navigations skills may or will be required; very long marked routes

The following kit should be brought to the race by all runners. The race director will advise on the day, by means of a display board at race sign-on, which kit must be brought out on the course. The RD will decide the mandatory kit based on factors including time of year, weather conditions & forecast, length and climb of course, remoteness of terrain etc.

- Waterproof jacket with integrated hood and taped seams
- Hat or buff
- Gloves
- Whistle
- Charged mobile phone with emergency number stored
- Foil blanket/Blizzard jacket/bivvy bag
- Means to carry a minimum of 500 mL water
- Waterproof full leg cover
- Emergency food
- Map of route/area
- Compass

Rationale: These races entail a real chance of runners getting into difficulty, especially in poor conditions. A race that might be run safely one day with just a jacket might require a much fuller kit on a different day! The RD needs to be able to make a sensible call, taking into

account type of event, conditions ON THE DAY, time of year, daylight hours available, any other relevant factors. As with standard kit if there is clearly no need to carry more than the jacket that can very easily be the case.

FAQ

What's changing?

Instead of just bringing a jacket to every race, runners will need to get used to bringing the full kit which MIGHT be required on the day, as advised on the race page. The ACTUAL KIT TO BE CARRIED will be advised on the day, at registration. This will keep things clear and fair for everyone and ensure if conditions on race day are poor and necessitate the carrying of extra kit, everyone will have what they need with them.

When will the changes come into effect?

1st January 2024.

Will this cost me money?

You may find you need to invest in some items such as a better jacket, a foil blanket and some others. But these are basic safety items, of which you might be very glad if something goes wrong in a remote spot when help isn't going to be immediate. Quite a few races already have the extra kit as mandatory, but on an ad hoc basis.

Will I have to carry extra kit during races?

Only if conditions dictate. The Race Director will make a call on race day as to what needs to be carried, depending on conditions, length/difficulty/remoteness of race *etc.* In many races the kit to be carried will be just the jacket, as people are used to now. But if you need the extra stuff, you'll have it with you ready to go.

Will there be kit checks?

Yes! Not necessarily a full check at every race – but you should expect to be checked.

What if I don't have the full kit?

If you can't comply at a pre-race check, you'll be advised that you won't be included in the race (no refunds!). You may be able to borrow something in a hurry – but far easier to have it with you in the first place.

If you fail a kit check at the finish – disqualification.

Will there be consistency from race to race?

As much as possible, yes. For example, all Irish Championship races will be assigned Level C (Advanced), as they venture into quite remote country, are largely unmarked and entail a risk of getting lost in poor visibility. All Leinster League races will be Level B (Standard); Trail League races will be Level A (Basic). Runners just need to check the race page on the IMRA site, all the info will be there.

What's with carrying a mobile phone?

The phone will only be mandatory where there's a reason – usually remote terrain, long races, poor weather etc. Useable signal isn't guaranteed in the Irish mountains, but is often pretty good. Having the phone can make it much easier for you to get help if you need it and may help the organisers to check in with you if you're not back in the expected time. And if things go bad and a search is needed, emergency services can gain valuable information from a phone's last known location, even if coverage or battery life becomes a problem, knowing where to start looking from last known location is a big help.

Why should I carry food/water? I don't eat or drink during races!

Again – only mandatory when the race conditions mean it would be prudent. Note there is no *quantity* stipulated – just the means to carry 500 mL water and some food – you can choose how much or how little. A bit like the jacket – you may not plan to use it, but might be very glad of it if something goes wrong and you're out longer than planned.

Why the map & compass? I don't know how to use them!

Some races require navigation as an integral part of the race. Anyone entering such a race needs to be a competent navigator – these aren't beginner events. Other races may be on reasonably defined, but unmarked routes – where you're going may be quite obvious in good visibility, but if the mist comes down it's a different story – really easy to get lost. The expectation here is runners will have the map and compass and the ability to use them if needed. If you're not a navigator, agree beforehand to run with someone who is – but don't turn up and just expect to follow someone; it may not be welcome and you could have a problem if you can't keep up. The race page info will help you decide if this race is for you or not – if in doubt contact the organiser, *e.g.* via the forum for advice.

Is using GPS devices allowed?

In some races YES, in some NO. This is already clearly stated on each race page. In a non-GPS event you can always use a device to get yourself back to safety, but if you do the expectation is you'll declare it to the organiser and be recorded as a DNF. We trust runners to be honest in this regard.

Can I jettison kit along the way?

No. Mandatory kit should be carried for the entire race. Obviously food/drink can be consumed along the way, but bring any packaging back with you – leave no trace!

Will there be any other non-standard mandatory kit?

The kit listed for the 3 categories is expected to cover almost all eventualities. Occasionally, special conditions may apply to an event and additional kit might be required, for example an event taking place at night (or where you could be out past nightfall in a long race) might require a torch and spare batteries/back-up torch. Any such will be clearly described on the race page.

I'm planning on volunteering as a Race Director. How will I know what kit to make mandatory on the day?

RD training will help, but you'll need to judge things based on your knowledge of the course, conditions etc. You can always contact the Safety Officer or another committee member for advice, but try to do that in good time.