

# COVID 19 – Preparing to safely return back to flying (Guidance) – Unmanned Aircraft System Operations in UK Airspace

CAP 2131

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Enquiries regarding the content of this publication should be addressed to: [uavenquiries@caa.co.uk](mailto:uavenquiries@caa.co.uk).

## Important Note

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This CAA guidance document is intended to complement guidelines issued by HM Government, the Department for Transport and Public Health bodies.

You must only operate within the guidance around recreational flying activities as advised by Government.

Whilst every effort is made to ensure that all advice is pertinent at time of publication, the CAA reserves the right to amend or withdraw this document to accommodate changes to HM Government policy, to correct errors and omissions or to reflect changes in national policy and best practice.

# Contents

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Contents.....	3
Introduction .....	4
Purpose.....	4
All recreational remote pilots .....	5
General health, wellbeing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) .....	5
Your aircraft.....	5
Footnote.....	6

## Introduction

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The UAS Implementing Regulation became applicable within the UK on 31/12/2020 and operations of unmanned aircraft now fall into one of three categories:

- Open category – operations that present a low (or no) risk to third parties. Operations are conducted in accordance with basic and pre-defined characteristics and are not subject to any further authorisation requirements.
- Specific category – operations that present a greater risk than that of the Open category, or where one or more elements of the operation fall outside the boundaries of the Open category. Operations will require an operational authorisation from the CAA, based on a safety risk assessment.
- Certified category – operations that present an equivalent risk to that of manned aviation and so will be subjected to the same regulatory regime (i.e. certification of the aircraft, certification of the operator, licensing of the pilot).

This regulation has changed the way in which unmanned aircraft (UA) are regulated and remote pilots are reminded that they should educate themselves prior to undertaking flights. The CAA has published materials that enable the regulations to be understood more easily. [CAP722](#) is the primary guidance document for the operation of unmanned aircraft systems within the UK. Additionally, [CAP2003](#), [CAP2004](#), [CAP2006](#), [CAP2007](#), and [CAP2012 have been published](#), but it is advised to visit the [CAA website](#) if you are not familiar with the regulations. A remote pilot who is unsure of the regulations and how they apply to them should contact the CAA UAS Team at [uavenquiries@caa.co.uk](mailto:uavenquiries@caa.co.uk).

## Purpose

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The purpose of this guidance is to help remote pilots return safely to operate following the easing of Government COVID-19 related restrictions on recreational flying, which has resulted in an extended period of ‘minimal or no UA flying’.

The Open category is divided into three ‘subcategories’, in order to specify certain rules for different types of flying. The category you fall into depends on the type of drone you wish to fly, and how you wish to fly it.

- A1: Flying ‘over’ people;
- A2: Flying ‘close to’ people;
- A3: Flying ‘far from’ people;

You must always comply with the rules of whichever subcategory you are flying in.

Most people, flying a UAS away from people in the open countryside will fall into the basic requirements of the A3 category- these are similar to the previous UK regulations which were previously in place. A comparison of these regulations, can be found in our factsheet

[CAP2008](#). The A1 and A2 categories allow flying closer to people, but with more restrictions.

## All recreational remote pilots

We appreciate that remote pilots will want to return to the air safely as soon as possible. In view of any extended period on the ground, the CAA recommends a few sensible precautions and things to consider before doing so. However, you must only operate within the guidance around recreational flying activities as advised by Government. As the UK's aviation safety regulator, we understand remote pilots will be keen to get back in the air again. It is vital to remember that all pilots will experience some amount of "Skills fade/degradation" irrespective of your level of flying experience. Guidance for addressing "Skills fade/degradation" can be found within [CAP722](#), Chapter 5, Human Factors and Safety Management.

## General health, wellbeing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Do you remain fit and well? Are you (and any supporting crew) clear of any decrease in medical fitness that may adversely affect flight safety? Any pilot who has had a decrease in their medical fitness that might impair the safe operation should not fly unless they can ensure the flight can be made safely. If you choose to wear any PPE, you must ensure it does not create a flight safety hazard or inhibit safe operation of the aircraft in any way. Remote pilots are reminded, as per Article 241 of the ANO 2016, 'A person must not recklessly or negligently cause or permit an aircraft to endanger any person or property'.

## Your aircraft

The first consideration, before resuming flying operations, should be to review any manufacturers' guidance on servicing requirements when the aircraft has not flown for an extended period.

### Pre flight

When checking the aircraft after an extended period of no or minimal flights be more diligent with the pre-flight checks. Pay attention to any moveable arms, locking pins, perishable components, the battery, control surfaces, aircraft firmware and the general condition of the aircraft for signs of any damage or degradation. If you have any concerns seek advice from the manufacturer.

### Battery/ Fuel

The battery/fuel is probably the most important and volatile component of the UAS, and a comprehensive check is vital. Has the battery been stored correctly whilst the aircraft has been on the ground? Does the battery have any signs of bulging? Have any of the pins been bent or broken? Has the battery been dented/ pierced?

The capacity of LiPo batteries is reduced when stored incorrectly and tests should be undertaken to determine any reduction in effective flight time. If you have any concerns seek advice from the manufacturer.

### Flight Planning/Skill Fade

The decay of a skill due to a period of non-use is a natural human attribute and a remote pilot should be conscious of this.

Pilots that have not flown regularly since lockdown may consider conducting a period of practical flight training. It is recommended any practical flight training is conducted within the operating conditions of subcategory A3 (at a distance of 150m horizontally from residential, commercial, industrial or recreational areas and with no uninvolved persons present in the area of flight) but simulating the operating situations associated with ‘your normal’ operations.

What types of flight are you considering? We would recommend that initial flights focus on general handling. This means you can get back up to speed in a controlled way, in an environment you are familiar with, and operating within weather conditions suitable for your aircraft. Best practice does not encourage having one short check out flight and then flying in a complex new destination in marginal weather.

It is also worth noting, other airspace users, such as those from the manned general aviation community or commercial UAS sector, may be planning a return to flying at this time and with the return of good weather. Other airspace users will likely face similar situations in terms of skills fade and degradation.

Have you checked all relevant documentation and updates, such as:

1. Insurance
2. Flyer/Operator ID currency
3. NOTAMs and Airspace Restrictions
4. Take-off permissions and Byelaws
5. Aircraft firmware

Please note this is a non-exhaustive list.

### Footnote

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The CAA will continue to derive policy based on information published by the Department for Transport. All remote pilots and organisations are strongly urged to regularly check the following website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-aviation-guidance-for-operators>

Remote pilots may also wish to keep up to date with the latest CAA news and alerts via [SkyWise](#).

And finally:

***Fly Safely!***

**UK Civil Aviation Authority – Unmanned Aircraft System Unit**

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