**Statement from the AOAC committee in relation to reduction of COVID risk during residential trips – 24/1/22**

As you will hopefully be aware, the committee asked for feedback from members in relation to AOAC guidelines on residential trips and the increased risk that being inside with others brings.  Thank you to those who have contacted us with their views.

We discussed all points of view at the recent committee meeting on 19/1/22 and considered the following options which were suggested by members:

*1. Ask members to disclose whether or not they have been vaccinated against COVID-19*

*2. Organisers of trips choose their own requirements e.g. whether people attending should have 1,2 or 3 vaccinations.*

*3. No unvaccinated members to be allowed on residential trips (other than those with medical exemptions)*

*4. Keep guidelines as they are currently.*

*5. Cancel all residential trips until risk of COVID-19 has passed (no-one suggested this but was considered for completeness).*

As with other decisions made during the pandemic, we have continued to use government COVID-19 guidelines to inform AOAC policies/risk assessments.

We have concluded that our current guidance for residential trips is still appropriate and we feel both complies with the letter and spirit of the current government guidelines.

The full discussion will be documented in the minutes which will be available on the AOAC website following approval. However, in brief, the reasons for our decision are as follows:

-          Asking for private medical information would require a large amount of work in relation to ensuring we are acting lawfully (e.g. GDPR, Human Rights).

-          We appreciate the difficult decisions that members have to make in relation to attending residential events due to the possible impact on health/work/caring responsibilities if they catch COVID-19. However, it is still possible for a vaccinated person (even with 3 jabs) to contract COVID and pass it on to someone else who is vaccinated. **Although the risk is reduced it is not eliminated completely even by ensuring everyone on a trip is vaccinated.**

The committee would like to be very clear that we have investigated/thoroughly discussed these guidelines on a number of occasions, including the most recent review. These are not straightforward decisions and there are also committee members with health concerns and caring responsibilities who have had to miss out on residential trips for this reason too.

We would also like to remind members of the Code of Conduct that everyone signs up to when joining the AOAC. Please respect those with views different to your own, even if you do not understand/agree with them.  People have various reasons for choosing not to be vaccinated; these might not be medical but are valid to them and these choices should be private.

***NB These requirements apply whether or not you have been vaccinated, as you can still get infected/pass on infection even if double-vaccinated***

**No AOAC event – especially residential - will ever be risk-free in relation to COVID-19, and members need to continue make their own personal judgement as to whether they wish to attend or not.**

The current AOAC SOP and RA for COVID-19 are posted on the AOAC website so please familiarise yourself with them.

**Most importantly, please ensure you take a lateral flow test the day before and each morning of the trip; do not attend/let the organiser know and go home immediately if you have a positive test.**These tests are not 100% accurate however are the best readily-available tool we have available at present to detect potential COVID-19 infections.

*Organisers – please remind participants of these requirements when you send out pre-trip information.*

***If you do not feel able to follow these requirements for any reason then please do not book on a residential trip.***

These guidelines will be reviewed again at the next committee meeting in February or earlier if further government guidelines are published.

We understand that some members may continue to feel we have not gone far enough with these requirements, but we feel they are applicable under present government rules and guidelines in place and reflect the view of the vast majority of members.  They are also in line with other activity clubs running residential trips.

We hope that everyone is able to continue to enjoy whatever activities they feel safe participating on.

Katie Wiltshier

AOAC Chair on behalf of the AOAC Committee