

Swim England Affiliated Club Outdoor Swimming Guidance



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Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to establish a comprehensive framework that prioritises safety when participating in outdoor environments. Safety is paramount in any activity, particularly outdoors where the risks can be significant if not managed appropriately. This document aims to provide clear guidance for all stakeholders, including Swim England staff, volunteers, and participants, to ensure a culture of safety is maintained at all times.

This guidance applies to outdoor aquatic activities organised or facilitated by Swim England affiliated clubs, while primarily focused on open water swimming, the principles within may also be applied to other aquatic activities such as water polo for example. By adhering to this policy, Swim England and its affiliated clubs aim to reduce risk, enhance participant experience, and create a safer environment for everyone involved.

The foundation of this policy is built upon established good practice and guidelines provided by leading safety organisations, including the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS UK), Surf Life Saving Great Britain (SLSGB) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA). These organisations provide documents that serve as essential references, ensuring our policies are aligned with national safety standards. To further enhance the resources available to Swim England clubs we support Beyond Swim, a scheme primarily focused on accrediting safe venues. These resources are available to all Swim England clubs and reference can be made to them when planning your outdoor swimmer session.

By implementing this guidance, we commit to fostering an environment where safety is the responsibility of everyone. This document will serve as a living resource, regularly updated to reflect new insights and changing regulations in the field of aquatic safety.

To give feedback or gain further clarification on the document please contact clubdevelopment@swimming.org

Definitions

This document refers to outdoor activity and open water swimming.

Swimming shall mean any Swim England sanctioned activity in an open water space.

Open Water Swimming is the competitive discipline that takes place under World Aquatics rules and guidance unless otherwise stated.

Outdoor swimming is used to refer to the broader participation in outdoors water as we recognise there is a broad spectrum of participation, however this document does not cover cold water therapy, ultra long distance swimming (10Km+), ice swimming, wild swimming in extreme or remote environments and cliff diving.

Staff to include paid and unpaid roles undertaken by persons engaged by the National Governing Body, its regional and county associations or its affiliated clubs and members.

Competence can be described as the combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely. Other factors, such as attitude and physical ability, can also affect someone's competence.

As an employer or organiser, you should take account of the competence of relevant staff when you are making risk assessments. This will help you decide what level of information, instruction, training, and supervision you need to provide.

Types of Outdoor Sessions

There are various scenarios in which a club may choose to access outdoor swimming. The list below is not exhaustive but covers the most typical scenarios:

1. Club members attend a managed venue and pay an individual entry fee. This is akin to a club social trip and the session is uncoached or free swim, it can be treated as per other club single day activities.
2. Club members attend a managed venue to complete a coached or led session by a suitably qualified club coach or one provided by the venue. This arrangement may include the club hiring the facility.
3. The club delivers a session in a non-managed venue where the session is coached or led by a suitably qualified coach or leader and water safety is arranged and provided by the club.

Safety Principles

Safety principles are the cornerstone of our aquatic activities. A proactive approach to safety begins with thorough risk assessments that identify potential hazards associated with each activity. Regular risk assessments and reviews must be conducted before, during, and after aquatic sessions to adapt to changing conditions, participant capabilities and environmental factors.

Emergency procedures are integral to our safety framework. All staff and volunteers must be trained in specific emergency response protocols tailored to each activity. This includes evacuation procedures, first aid responses, and communication strategies during incidents. Clear, written emergency action plans should be available to all involved, ensuring familiarity in case of emergencies.

Training is crucial to maintaining a high standard of safety. All staff and volunteers involved in providing safety cover must complete sufficient education, supervision and training to fulfil their role and responsibility. This may include lifesaving skills, first aid, and specific training related to their roles. Regular refresher courses should be provided to ensure competency is maintained.

Furthermore, the principle of continuous improvement must guide our safety practices. We encourage feedback from staff, volunteers and participants to identify areas for

Beyond Swim's core safety principle is that safety cover should be able to reach a struggling swimmer to assist them within one minute and recover them to land where CPR can be administered in a further 2 minutes. This is likely to mean swimmers are within 50m of land, where no powered craft are available. It is recommended that this principle is applied throughout your planning process, for further information please reference [Beyond Swim's Organised Swimming Guidance](#).

enhancement. This iterative process helps us adapt our policies and procedures, making safety a dynamic rather than static pursuit.

Planning your open water session

A summary and checklist of this process can be found in [Appendix 4](#)

Membership, Insurance and Constitution

For a club (and its members) to be covered by Swim England insurance protection for open water swimming, the club needs to ensure that:

- The club constitution makes reference to open water swimming as a club activity.
- The guidance within this document is followed.
- The club has a robust risk assessment in place for the activity that demonstrates the risks the club have identified for the activity and how they have been mitigated.
- Any club member taking part in club activity must be a current Swim England member of the appropriate category.

Please note in the event of a claim an incident will always be dealt with on a case by case basis, looking at the risk assessment and how the club has attempted to mitigate any risk identified.

Accrediting your provision with Beyond Swim

Swim England Affiliated clubs can accredit their open water provision to Beyond Swim for free, this acts as a quality mark of your plans and preparation to offer safe high quality delivery. To do this reference the process in [Appendix 5](#).

Roles and Responsibilities

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are vital to the safe and effective delivery of the sport. Member clubs are tasked with the responsibility for safety compliance, ensuring that all guidance, regulations and standards are met.

Activity Organiser

Activity organisers are responsible for ensuring that aquatic activities are well-planned, safe, inclusive, and compliant with safety and safeguarding (**Wavepower**) standards. They must coordinate all aspects of the activity, from risk assessment to participant safety, and ensure compliance with relevant Swim England guidelines. The organiser should ensure that where open water or outdoor swimming becomes a regular club activity is added to the club's constitution and the relevant region is notified.

Coach or Leader

Where a session is coached or led (rather than scenario 1, that of a free swim experience), the appropriate certification must be held ([Appendix 1](#)). Coaches and Leaders hold a Duty of Care to all participants and therefore play a critical role in the direct implementation of safety measures during aquatic activities as well as ensuring a positive experience for all. They are responsible for planning and delivering of session content, ensuring participant adherence to safety protocols and for conducting pre-activity briefings to educate participants about risks and safety procedures. We also recommend continually seeking professional development opportunities to enhance competence to operate in an outdoor environment.

- The coach must have an appropriate qualification recognised by Swim England to be eligible to coach at a club open water training session. If this is not the case then the Club's Swim England insurance policy may be void.
- Level 3 (Senior) coaches are NOT qualified to lead open water sessions in outdoor water. They can support an appropriately qualified coach in the open water environment.

Water Safety Roles

Water Safety Lead

A Water Safety Lead is a designated individual responsible for overseeing water safety practices. Their role is critical in ensuring that policies, procedures and measures are in place to mitigate the risks associated with participation in our activities. Where sessions are taking place at a managed venue (see Venues section) many of the responsibilities below fall on the venue however we recommend a responsible organiser is aware of the venue's arrangements, checking and challenging them where appropriate. Where the club is swimming outside of an organised venue this responsibility should fall to a suitably qualified and experienced person.

The responsibilities of a Water Safety Lead typically include:

- Development of water safety plans

Creating and Implementing Plans: The Water Safety Lead develops comprehensive water safety plans detailed in a Normal Operating Procedure (NOP) that outline the risks, preventive measures, and emergency responses detailed in an Emergency Action Plan (EAP).

- Risk Assessments

Conduct regular risk assessments for all water activities to identify potential hazards and implement control measures. (See risk assessment section)

- Supervision and coordination

Supervising water safety team: Oversee lifeguards and other members of the water safety team, ensuring they are properly trained, vigilant, and adhering to the Normal Operating Procedure.

- Coordinating Emergency Response

Lead the coordination of emergency response efforts in the event of an incident, ensuring clear communication and quick action.

- Training and development

Training: Where appropriate organise water safety training programs for staff and volunteers, this may include lifeguards, support paddlers, spotters, rescue boat operators, and other relevant personnel.

Ongoing Education: Ensure staff and volunteers undergo continuous education in lifesaving techniques, first aid, and water rescue skills.

- Compliance with regulations

Regulatory Adherence: Ensure the facility or organisation is complying with local and national water safety regulations and standards (e.g., ILS guidelines, Health and Safety at Work Act, **Health and Safety Guidance 179 Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools**).

- Health and Safety Protocols

Regularly review and update health and safety protocols in line with legislative changes or updated best practices.

- Monitoring and auditing

Safety Audits: Conduct routine safety checks and audits of the aquatic environment, ensuring that equipment, signage, and safety systems are in good working condition.

- Incident Reporting and Analysis:

Oversee the reporting of incidents and near-misses to the Health and Safety Executive (where appropriate) and the subsequent review of risk assessments.

Lifeguard

Health and Safety Guidance 179 Managing Health and Safety in Swimming Pools

published by the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE), although aimed at built swimming pool facilities, defines a lifeguard as a person who is appropriately trained, qualified, and competent to perform supervision duties. Their primary role is to prevent accidents, provide immediate assistance and first aid when needed, and, most importantly, rescue swimmers in difficulty or danger. It is essential that lifeguards are;

- Qualified and competent to perform these tasks in the environment where swimming is taking place
- Appropriately equipped with rescue and first aid equipment to allow them to fulfil their role
- **Beyond Swim Organised Swimming Guidance** sets out the various available UK lifeguard awards and their task competency.

NB The RLSS National Pool Lifeguard Qualification does not qualify a person to lifeguard in outdoor environments that are not swimming pools. If the provided water safety cover does not hold an appropriate qualification the club's Swim England insurance protection would likely be void. If the venue or the club cannot provide appropriately qualified safety cover, the club must not access any body of water for training or any other open water activities.

Safety/Support Paddlers

Support paddlers are often used to provide assistance particularly in longer distance swims. Consideration should be given to whether the craft is appropriate (would a conscious compliant swimmer be able to hold on to it without capsizing it) and the paddler competent to handle the craft in close proximity to swimmers and in the event of assistance being required, whether they have the suitable qualification, skills and experience to do this (would they be able to assist a non-compliant or unconscious casualty).

We recommend anyone fulfilling this role holds the **Paddle UK Swimmer Safety and Rescue Awards**, is demonstrably competent to maneuver their craft in amongst swimmers and the craft is suitable for the purpose of supporting and rescuing a swimmer.

Spotters

There is currently no nationally recognised training or certification for the role of a spotter, while it may be beneficial to the overall safety system, it is crucial that the spotter understands and is able to:

- Identify a struggling swimmer or a swimmer in need of assistance
- Identify a drowning casualty
- Know when and how to raise the alarm and direct rescue or assistance

Participant

Participants also hold a significant responsibility in maintaining safety. All individuals must be made aware of safety guidelines and are encouraged to report any potential hazards or incidents. Creating a culture of shared responsibility fosters a collaborative environment where safety is a collective priority based on informed consent.

Swimmers taking part in club open water activities/training should demonstrate a reasonable degree of technical proficiency and appropriate skill levels to be eligible to take part in club open water activities/ training. We recommend participants are able to meet the outcomes of the **Swim England Open Water Award 1**.

An appropriately qualified coach or leader should be able to determine each individual swimmer's suitability to access the club open water activities and training.

All participating swimmers or their parents should sign a consent form acknowledging the additional risks related to club open water training and activities. The venue may also ask for additional information which may differ from location to location, based on local needs and policies.

Do not allow any swimmer to take part if there is any uncertainty around whether it is safe for an individual to swim, it is advisable for both the coach and swimmer to seek further advice in an open water swimming activity if they have.

- Open or unhealed wounds (see 'Swimming and aquatic activity before and after surgery' fact sheet).
- An injury or illness that might be made worse by participating in the prescribed training programme.
- A new (diagnosed or noticed in the last 4 weeks) or uncontrolled (diagnosed more than 4 weeks ago but going through a period of finding a balance through tests, treatment or medication) conditions or symptoms should seek the advice of an appropriate healthcare professional before consenting to an open water training programme.

It is the club's and swimmers' responsibility to ensure that those taking part are sufficiently fit and healthy (with any health conditions being well managed) to participate in open water. You should think about any pre-existing medical conditions that your swimmers may have and if you are in any doubt, we recommend they do not train/swim.

Swim England is committed to the inclusion of disabled people across our activities, including those taking place in open water. Where possible, reasonable adjustments should be made to accommodate the individual needs of disabled swimmers. Such adjustments should be agreed and communicated prior to participating and, if applicable, be risk assessed considering the impact that immersion in cold water may have upon the participant's impairment. Additional factors that need to be considered include:

- Entry and exit to the water
- Supervision ratios within the water (if applicable)
- Emergency evacuation procedures
- Additional kit or equipment

If required, consent forms should be explained to the participant to ensure they understand and consent to the additional risks related to open water training and activities.

Children and Young Swimmers

Swim England supports the provision of open water and outdoor swimming opportunities for children who wish to participate as and when they are confident and competent swimmers.

Beyond Swim contains guidance for varying age groups but in all cases:

Participation is subject to:

- Parent/legal guardian permission
- A competency test relevant to the activity they are participating in as well as an ability to 'self-rescue' (rotate on to back, float, signal for help and tread water). This is often best administered in a swimming pool session prior to your first outdoor session. For young swimmers undertaking basic sessions this may be as little as 25m. [The Swim](#)

England Open Water Award 1 can be delivered in the pool and acts as a good introduction to open water skills and competence*

- The swimmer being accompanied on site by a responsible adult, for younger swimmers aged 6 and 7 this involves the adult swimming with the young person.** From ages 8 to 14 the parent should remain on site and observe their swimmers (please reference **Beyond Swim Organised Swimming Guidance** for full details)
- In water participation may be limited to a maximum of 30 minutes for 6 and 7 year olds.

*At Swim Safe and similar participation events where risk is strictly contained it is very likely that undertaking a competency test is impractical. Consideration should be given to requesting a declaration of competency from the swimmer's parent or legal guardian. The swimmers' parent or legal guardian declaration of competency should be explicitly given to confirm the swimmer is able to swim 25m independently in full reach depth water without support. This declaration needs to be recorded by the event organiser.

**Due to the nature of Swim Safe the swimmer may not have to be accompanied in the water by an adult.

Welfare Officer

The Swim England Safeguarding Policy, Wavepower, requires the following:

- For any club which includes under 18's, every organisation must have a minimum of one Welfare Officer. The Welfare Officer role is essential in providing a first point of contact for children and adults within the organisation.
- For Swim England Clubs that do not have any child Members, the club should appoint a Welfare Officer. However, the named Welfare Officer may be the County Welfare Officer, if the Club has not appointed a Welfare Officer. The Club must inform all Members of the identity of the County Welfare Officer.

Venues

We recommend clubs use a managed and supervised outdoor swimming venue preferably accredited by Beyond Swim however the current provision is varied. As a result we recommend you contact the venue you plan to use prior to arrival to ensure that the venue is suitable for the activity.

Some venues will require a pre-booking prior to attending to enable them to safely manage numbers in the water. We also recommend the organiser and coaching staff visit the chosen venue prior to the first training session. This will aid risk assessment, writing of operating procedures and session planning.

A competent and well managed outdoor swimming venue operator should have the following in place:

- Normal Operating Procedure (NOP) and Emergency Action Plan (EAP) available for customers to view
- A written and regularly reviewed risk assessment with the necessary level of risk mitigations in place available for customers to view
- Appropriate safety cover that provide adequate supervision, rescue and first aid capability for the venue size, shape and bather load (See **Beyond Swim Organised Open Water Swimming Guidance** for more information).
- Water quality tests (Bacteriological, pH and algal) with results available (guidance for UK bathing water standards can be found [here](#) additional guidance is available from Beyond Swim.)
- Safety guidance for swimmers, staff and any partners/hosts

There are a number of accreditation schemes available, Swim England partner with British Triathlon and a number of other governing bodies on the Beyond Swim Accreditation programme, venues holding this accreditation should meet of the above requirements.

Accredited venues can be found [here](#).

Risk assessment

When a venue has been identified, a risk assessment should be sought from the managed venue and reviewed. In the instance that the session will take place at an unmanaged venue, an overarching venue and activity specific risk assessment should be undertaken prior to your session, this will inform your Normal Operating Procedure (NOP) and Emergency Action Plan (EAP). A risk assessment template can be found in [Appendix 2](#). Further guidance is available to assist in this process by referencing the [Beyond Swim Organised Swimming Guidance](#). Swim England affiliated clubs can accredit their provision to Beyond Swim for free (Procedure in [Appendix 5](#))

The risk assessment should be carried out by a competent person familiar with the environment and planned activity. It is advisable that the risk assessment is completed and reviewed by multiple competent persons to ensure all considerations have been made, Beyond Swim accreditation will fulfil this requirement.

The risk assessment must be documented, it should detail hazards, risks and their mitigations, the person that completed and reviewed and the original date and last review date.

As the outdoor environment is changeable a daily analytical risk assessment should be undertaken and recorded immediately prior to your session, this should inform any changes to your NOP, these should be recorded on that document and briefed to staff/volunteers and swimmers, a sample daily analytical risk assessment can be found in [Appendix 3](#). This will support the club in the event of an incident by demonstrating a responsible and proactive approach to managing safety. It will also provide a written template for the coaches of future sessions, particularly club training sessions where the organiser may change.

Important:

- The risk assessment, and any subsequent update, should be undertaken at the venue.
- The risk assessment and associated safety documents must be “live” and regularly reviewed and updated.

Any measures to manage safety identified within the document must be in place (any deviation on the day should be documented*) prior to the session taking place e.g. change to swim route due to weather conditions.

For further information on conducting a full risk assessment, clubs can reference the Swim England Open Water Swimming Coach or Swim England Outdoor Swimming Leader Award education course resources, a risk assessment template is included in [Appendix 2](#).

The risk assessment will help the coach (and the organiser/venue manager) identify whether the body of water is suitable for open water swimming and that participants are not at undue risk due to the venue's location or condition. There are a number of factors that need to be considered and documented including both environmental and people hazards.

Normal Operating Procedure (NOP) and Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

If swimming at a managed venue you may choose to swim using that venue's NOP; at unmanaged venues you must create an NOP and EAP. The NOP and EAP should in either case detail:

- Description of venue – including maps, diagrams of swim course, entries, exits, rescue and first aid equipment, nature of water – lake, sea, depth, known currents or flow, expected water temperatures for period of use, changing arrangements and rewarming protocols.
- Water safety provision – staff qualifications, number, equipment use, availability and maintenance, positions and communication of persons.
- Check in/out procedures for staff, volunteers and swimmers
- Water quality and procedures for testing and notifying users
- Access and egress arrangements for emergency vehicles
- Actions to be undertaken by all parties in the event of foreseeable accidents or incidents

Further guidance on creating NOP and EAPs can be sought by referencing the [Beyond Swim Organised Swimming Guidance](#).

Where clubs undertake coached or lead sessions at managed venues it is advisable to create an addendum to the venues NOP that details club session specific procedures and arrangements. These considerations may include:

- Access arrangements for club – meeting points, parent supervision.
- Coach/leader : Swimmer ratio.
- What to do if a swimmer wishes to leave a session early, how they will be escorted and safety for the rest of the group maintained.
- What happens in the event of coach or safety cover illness or injury.
- How the session will accommodate differing abilities and experience levels.

It is important that all of those involved in session delivery are familiar with the NOP and EAP.

Ratios

The ratio of coach/leader to swimmers will be dependent on both venue/activity risk assessment and the analytical risk assessment carried on the day of the session it is recommended that:

- Open Water Swimming Coaches should adhere to a limit of 1:20 participants.
- Outdoor Swim Leaders are limited to a ratio of 1:8

In both cases suitable safety cover should be in place. In accordance with Wavepower, when working with under 18s at least two adults should be present.

Coaching Position

Where sessions are coached they should only be coached from the water's edge, pontoon or water craft (kayak, rowing or motor boat) not in the water, as per pool based coaching sessions. If using a manually powered water craft to coach, the coach should be competent on that craft and have taken suitable safety precautions for example a buoyancy aid, leash and carry a means of calling for help themselves. Powered craft should be appropriate for use and operated by a competent, qualified person.

Water Temperature

When considering a suitable temperature for open water and outdoor swimming, it should be noted that cold tolerance is highly individual and can change from session to session. Water temperature often lags the annual fluctuation in air temperature. Small, shallow bodies of water tend to warm up and cool down faster and to a greater degree than larger bodies of water.

For training purposes it is recommended that open water swimming should take place in water at 11°C and above. At temperatures lower than this significant amendments should be made to the NOP and session plan, these can be found in the [Beyond Swim Organised Outdoor Swimming Guidance](#).

World Aquatics recommends that all open water competitions should take place in water temperatures of 16°C to 31°C, World Aquatics [competition regulations](#) are designed around competing in long distance (5KM+) events.

Cold Water carries a number of risks that should be noted and mitigated in your risk assessment and normal operating procedure. Beyond Swim identifies cold water 11°C and 15.9°C

Cold Water Shock (CWS) can occur under 25°C and is most pronounced between 10°C and 15°C. On immersion the effects of cold-water shock include a gasp response, followed by a rapid increase in respiratory and heart rate, it may also be accompanied by an increase in blood pressure. This is an autonomic response and may also induce a feeling of panic. Typically, CWS begins to resolve between 60 to 90 seconds, it is important that participants are briefed on the effects before the session, know how to enter the water correctly to acclimatise and fully regain control of their breathing before submerging their face or commencing swimming.

Autonomic conflict occurs due to competing signals sent by the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system. The above effects of CWS stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, whereas putting the face in the water stimulates an opposite calming response (Mammalian Dive Reflex) from the parasympathetic system. Where underlying heart conditions are present this may result in catastrophic heart failure. To mitigate these risks, it is important to enter the water slowly, allowing cold water shock to pass before commencing swimming. Breath holding should be discouraged as should mass starts or race starts where swimmers are not fully acclimatised and/or the water is cold. Course layouts should also allow sufficient distance to the first turn that the field has an opportunity to spread and turn radius at the first turn should be 90 degrees or greater.

Swim Failure occurs from cooling of peripheral nerves and muscles, as these become cold, it becomes increasingly difficult to coordinate movement and generate enough power to maintain movement. Early signs may be a slowing of the stroke, a loss of stroke length or power and coordination. A loss of dexterity in the fingers is also a sign that cooling is progressing. Swimmers should remove themselves and be rewarmed gently.

Hypothermia occurs when the body's core temperature falls below 35°C. It often takes at least 30 minutes to reach this stage. However a swimmer is likely to have shown signs of peripheral cooling by this point and should have been removed from the water.

After drop is the continued cooling of the body even after being removed from the water, it is common for the body's core temperature to continue to drop for up to 20 minutes after exit. It is important to follow rewarming protocols closely, monitor swimmers and not

undertake dangerous tasks such as driving or cycling in that period. Saunas, hot tubs, hot showers and baths should be avoided in rewarming too quickly.

Overheating can also be a risk when open water swimming, particularly where swimmers are working hard in warm water with warm air temperatures, care should be taken to ensure they have adequate rest, hydration and opportunity to cool down. While unlikely in the UK, if temperatures rise above that of a normal swimming pool, we would advise following World Aquatics competition regulations. Post swim swimmers should remain in shallow water to cool down before attempting to stand or walk.

Other hazards

This is not an exhaustive list of hazards but serves as a useful guide:

Wildlife

Care should be taken to avoid interaction with wildlife, larger animals, such as swans and seals may become aggressive when protecting nests or offspring. Presence of rats, water fowl or livestock in the vicinity may also affect water quality.

Course layout

Courses should be laid out in order that swimmers can comfortably enter and acclimatise, the length should be such that safety cover can observe and reach a casualty in line with the competency of the safety cover provided. It is beneficial for safety if there are multiple opportunities for swimmers to safely exit the water. In cold water scenarios it is suggested that a smaller more compact course may be beneficial to swimmer safety. Beyond Swim's Safety Principle is that safety cover should be able to reach a struggling swimmer within one minute and recover them to land where CPR can be administered in a further 2 minutes. Beyond Swim also provides guidance on laying of buoys and course shape.

Currents

In natural water bodies there will often be moving water, all efforts should be made to avoid swimming in conditions where current is faster than walking speed. Consideration should be given to flow from incoming or out flowing water courses, estuarine flow, tidal movement, littoral currents and rip currents. Flow speeds will often differ from hour to hour and swims should be planned with this in mind.

Litter

The route to and from the water should be checked to be clear of hazards, once in the water it is unfortunately not uncommon to encounter plastic bags and discarded fishing tackle that may cause entanglement or injury.

Weather

Wind direction and strength will affect surface water state (creating wind chop and waves) and movement. It may also have a wind chill effect on swimmers and staff.

Rain may affect water quality due to run off. Periods of heavy rain may also mean effect flow rates and water levels affecting entry and exit points.

Electrical storms pose a significant risk to swimmers and staff, the 30:30 rule should be adhered to.

Sunshine and UV levels pose a significant risk of sunburn and subsequent skin damage to swimmers and staff.

Air Temperature may be variable throughout the season or even day. Staff and swimmers should be prepared to deal with extremes of heat or cold throughout their swim and afterwards.

Other water users can often pose a significant hazard particularly other water sports and powered craft. Control measures include segregation and increasing the visibility of the group

Water Quality

Organised venues will often test regularly and have a profile of their water. However additional care should be taken when using unmanaged venues, swimming at a designated bathing water while not a sign of cleanliness offers some advantages. During bathing water season (May to September) they are monitored weekly by the Environment Agency for bacterial content with reports published on their **Swimfo** website, they also publish Pollution Risk Forecasts (PRFs) for these designated bathing waters. Bathing waters are not tested for other sources of pollution such as algae and chemical pollution. Heavy rain is often a cause of significant decreases in water quality, along with Environment agency reporting for designated bathing waters, water companies currently monitor combined sewage overflows and publish live spill data, this may be an important factor in your NOP and analytical risk assessment process. Beyond Swim offers further guidance on testing of water quality.

Swimming Induced Pulmonary Edema (SIPE)

SIPE occurs when fluid accumulates in the lungs in the absence of water aspiration during swimming, causing acute shortness of breath and a cough productive of blood-tinged sputum. It is currently poorly understood however limited studies show high blood pressure, female sex, fish oil use, long course distance and smaller lung capacity and flows may increase risk of SIPE.

Evidence on SIPE prognosis and prevention is very limited, although it seems that most people recover quickly if removed from the water, and recurrence is common. If a swimmer experiences symptoms they should be removed from the water immediately, if symptoms do not resolve or worsen after removal medical advice should be sought.

Spencer, S., Dickinson, J. & Forbes, L. Occurrence, Risk Factors, Prognosis and Prevention of Swimming-Induced Pulmonary Oedema: a Systematic Review. *Sports Med - Open* 4, 43 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40798-018-0158-8>

Equipment for swimmers

Wetsuits

World Aquatics open water competition regulations mandate the wearing of a full body wetsuit for all open water swimming *competitions* below 18°C. Wetsuits provide insulation against the cold, which improves cold water tolerance and will extend the time a swimmer can remain (comfortably) in the water. It is recommended that as part of your risk assessment process you consider the use of wetsuits to mitigate the risk associated with cold water swimming as well as providing a positive experience for participants. Swimmers may also choose to wear neoprene gloves, socks or swimming hats in low temperatures.

Swimming Hats

A high visibility swim cap should be worn to aid visibility to other water users as well as safety cover. Colours such as fluorescent green, orange and pink are shown to be most visible on the water.

Goggles

Allow swimmers to see underwater obstructions, other swimmers and sight effectively. Clear goggles are recommended for cloudy days and anti-glare for sunny days.

Whistle

A pea less whistle to attract attention if someone gets into difficulty is useful, this can be attached to a tow float, tied to a wetsuit or even a costume.

Tow floats

A tow float may be appropriate as they provide excellent visibility to safety cover and coaches. They should be relied up as a floatation aid as they are not currently rated or tested as such devices.

Equipment for coaches and organisers

We recommend that coaches, safety cover and other staff or volunteers have access to binoculars and communication devices such as radios and whistles. If using craft or working close to the water's edge they should wear appropriate buoyancy aids for the conditions. If appropriate, sunblock should be applied at least 30 minutes prior to swimming. Polarised sunglasses and hats to block the glare and sunlight may aid in ensuring that swimmers remain visible. Also consider keeping coaches and volunteers protected from wet and cold weather, if they are wearing additional clothing they may require additional buoyancy aids in the event of a slip or trip at the water's edge.

Ensure there is a supply of appropriate hand wipes/sanitizers for use by your swimmers and staff.

Safety cover should have access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), rescue equipment and first aid supplies, it is highly recommended that an automated external defibrillator (AED) is available.

Swim Procedures

Pre-swim staff arrival and briefing

On arrival at the venue, the responsible person should complete the analytical risk assessment and brief other staff on any changes or significant difference between the NOP and the resulting session plan.

Swimmer briefing

Swimmers should be briefed by the session leader on the aim of the session and safety considerations, if using a buddy or group system this is a good opportunity to buddy up participants.

Swimmer check in

A check in system should be in use for all swimmers participating, a numbered band or hat system works well, with numbers being allocated on a register, this allows swimmers to be easily identified in the event of an emergency and allows organisers to ensure all swimmers have exited the session.

Entry

Entry should take place where swimmers can either touch the floor or hold the side. They should enter the water slowly in a safe way that allows them to acclimatise to the water temperature, considering the risk of cold water shock and autonomic conflict – do not allow them to jump or dive in. They need to be able to have the opportunity to acclimatise to the water temperature and regulate their breathing close to the entry in case of an adverse reaction, they panic or need to exit. To acclimatise we recommend the swimmer:

- Immerse slowly up to knees/hips
- Splash forearms, back and neck, if wearing a wetsuit put water down the arms and front
- Whilst able to stand up, slowly sink up to the shoulders
- Once they can control their breathing either splash the face or put the face in the water and blow bubbles
- Start swimming slowly and only when breathing is controlled, do not breath hold.

During

Swimmers should be monitored for signs of distress, cooling or exhaustion, where swims take place over longer courses opportunity should be given for regular regrouping, welfare checks, rest, refueling etc.

NB If a swimmer becomes nervous, uncomfortable or tired, they should roll on to the back and float, breathing deeply until they regain control. If assistance is required, the swimmer should raise one arm in the air and loudly blow a whistle 3 times, a coach or leader may also do this to summon assistance.

Post Swim

Once swimmers have safely exited the water, they should be checked out, we recommend they seek a sheltered spot to ensure they are protected from any wind, dry off and dress immediately. It is advisable to put on multiple layers of warm clothes, including a hat and gloves in cold weather. This is to reduce the risk of swimmers suffering from after drop, however it is important not to re warm too aggressively, avoid hot baths, saunas, hot tubs or hot showers.

In warm weather, if your swimmers are feeling hot, they may need to sit in the shallows (if possible) before exiting to help reduce their body temperature

Before eating or drinking, clean the hands and face using fresh clean water and soap, sterilizing wipes or gels may also be useful

Swimmers and staff should rinse and wash all their kit in fresh water before drying thoroughly – including wetsuit, goggles, swim hat and swimming costume. This is important to avoid invasive species moving between venues.

Session debrief

It is beneficial to debrief with both swimmers and staff to improve future sessions, record the positives as this will help in planning future sessions.

In the event of incidents, accidents or near misses, complete the appropriate paperwork and ensure that the risk assessment is updated accordingly. Please report any incidents, accidents or near misses to Swim England, this allows us to identify common occurrences or themes, help you to mitigate future risk and to put in place education, guidance and training that may help others.

Illness

If any swimmers or staff are ill for up to three weeks following a swim post session they should seek medical advice by calling 111 or speaking to their GP highlighting that they have recently been swimming in open water.

Appendix 1 – Qualifications

Coaching and Leader Qualifications

The below qualifications are suitable for coaching a club open water swimming session:

- **Swim England Open Water Coach Level 2 Qualification**
- **British Triathlon Level 2 Coach with Open Water CPD**

The **Swim England Qualifications Outdoor Leader Award** may also be used to lead an organised outdoor swim. It is not a coaching qualification and should not be used as such.

Appendix 2 – Risk Assessment Template

A risk assessment should be produced for each activity where hazards are present that could cause harm to staff, volunteers or swimmers or members of the public.

- Firstly, break the activity down into steps.
- Think through each step, considering what the hazard(s) are - enter each hazard on a new line in the first column.
- Also include in the first column the potential harm to people and/or property that the hazard could cause.
- In the second column write what you are already doing to reduce the level of risk.
- In the next two columns respectively, enter a score from 1 to 5 (where 1=least; 5=most) for the likelihood of the hazard causing harm and the severity of harm it could cause.
- Now multiply those two scores to get the Risk Rating in column 5. The table below shows the action that should be taken.
- Consider what could be done to reduce the level of risk and enter it in column 6, specifying who is responsible and setting a target date for completion in the next two columns respectively. Once this has been done, the risk assessment should be reviewed. The target date will depend on the risk rating.

Risk Rating = Likelihood x Severity

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|---|-------------------|--------|------------|----------|----------|
| S e v e r i t y | Catastrophic | 5 | 5 | 10 | 15 | 20 | 25 |
| | Significant | 4 | 4 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 20 |
| | Moderate | 3 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 |
| | Low | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| | Negligible | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | Improbable | Remote | Occasional | Probable | Frequent |
| | | | Likelihood | | | | |

| | | |
|--------------|---|---------------|
| Catastrophic | ■ | STOP |
| Unacceptable | ■ | URGENT ACTION |
| Undesirable | ■ | ACTION |
| Acceptable | ■ | MONITOR |
| Desirable | ■ | NO ACTION |

| Activity and Other Hazards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any hazards not identified under environmental or people hazards | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|--|--|---|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| What are the hazards; Who might be harmed and how? | What are you already doing? | Risk Rating = L x S | | | What else do you need to do to manage and reduce this risk? | Action by whom? | Action by when? | Date Completed |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |

(Score Likelihood & Severity from 1 to 5: Likelihood – 1 = Improbable, 5 = Frequent; Severity – 1 = Negligible, 5 = Catastrophic)

Appendix 3 – Daily Analytical Risk Assessment Template

N.B. This form is a sample and can be amended to your venue, it should be completed at least daily, if not before each session if conditions change significantly.

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Location | |
| Date and time sessions | |
| Completed by | |
| Time Completed | |

| | Checked/ Notes | Proceed | Change | Stop | Action taken (Record overleaf if required) |
|---|-------------------|---------|--------|------|--|
| People | | | | | |
| Coaches/leaders | | | | | |
| Lifeguard/Safety Cover | | | | | |
| Volunteers | | | | | |
| Other land users | | | | | |
| Other water users | | | | | |
| Participant competency | | | | | |
| Environment | | | | | |
| Water depth | | | | | |
| Water temperature | | | | | |
| Water quality | | | | | |
| Wave size and type | | | | | |
| Tides/currents (Note tide times if relevant) | | | | | |
| Wind (Direction & Strength) | | | | | |
| Available light | | | | | |
| Air temperature | | | | | |
| Safe route to water's edge | | | | | |
| Safe entry point | | | | | |
| Safe exit point | | | | | |
| Extreme weather. e.g. lightning | | | | | |
| Sun damage - UV | | | | | |
| Beach/delivery area debris | | | | | |
| Communication signal | | | | | |

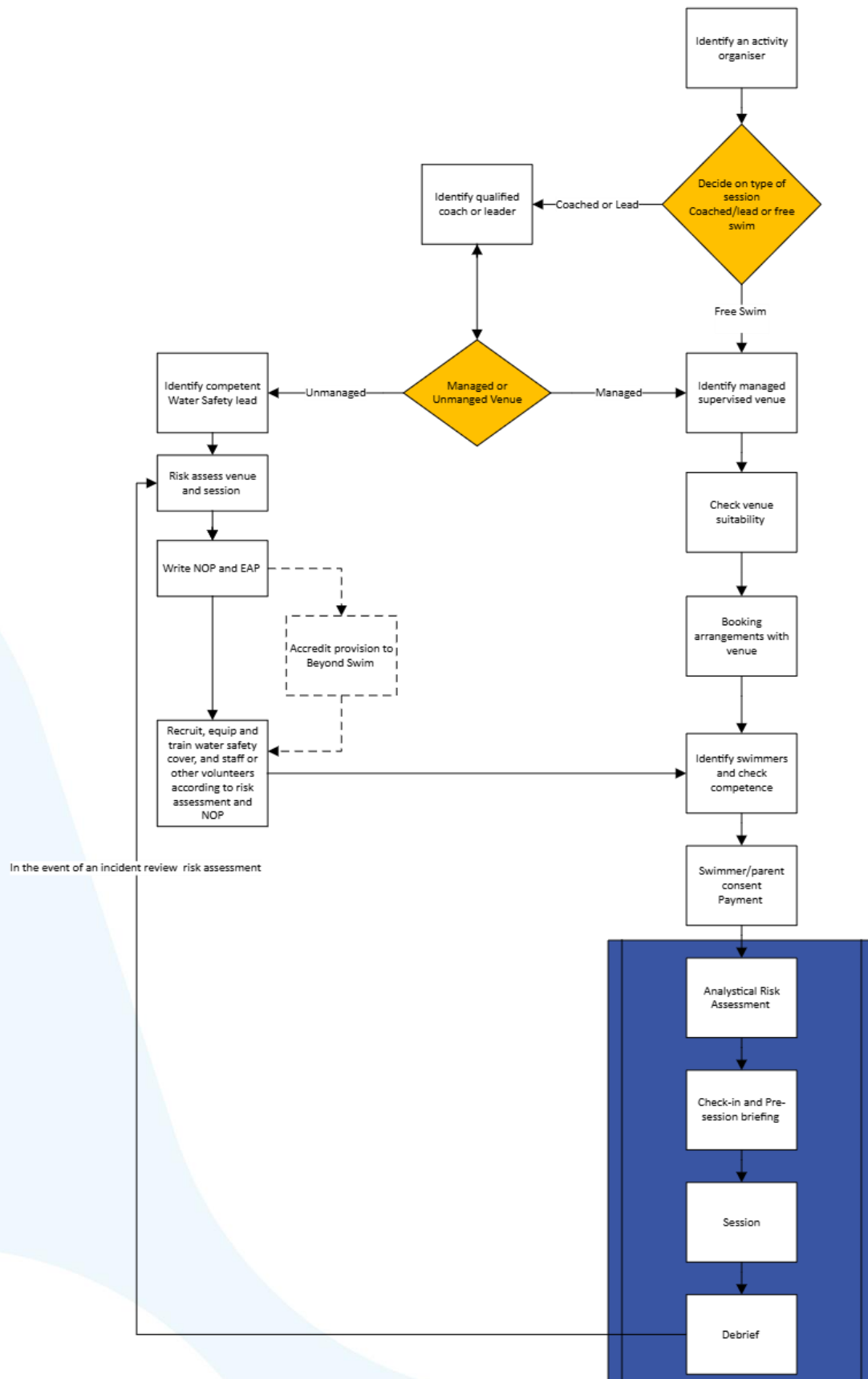
| | Checked/ Notes | Proceed | Change | Stop | Action taken (Record overleaf if required) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------|--------|------|--|
| Activity | | | | | |
| Ratios | | | | | |
| Level of challenge | | | | | |
| Additional Activities | | | | | |
| Other: | | | | | |

| No | Hazard/Incident | Additional Control Measure |
|----|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |

Continue on a second sheet if required

| Additional Comments |
|---------------------|
| |

Appendix 4 –Swim England Clubs Outdoor Swimming Process Map and Organiser Checklist



| Pre Session organisation | Complete |
|---|-----------------|
| Organiser identified | |
| Club constitution update to include open water swimming | |
| Membership updated to reflect open water as a club discipline | |
| Venue agreed | |
| Venue activity risk assessment completed or viewed | |
| NOP and EAP completed or viewed | |
| Open water qualified Coach/Leader recruited and trained | |
| Lifeguard/Safety Cover recruited and trained (must be appropriately qualified and equipped for rescues in an open water environment.) | |
| Swimmers invited (briefed/consent form and health declaration/payment/competency checked) | |
| On the day of the session | |
| Analytical risk assessment complete | |
| Staff briefing complete | |
| Swimmer briefing complete | |
| Headcount/check in procedure complete | |
| Safety cover and coaches in place | |
| Swimmers acclimatised | |
| Post Session | |
| Swimmers checked out | |
| Debrief | |
| Risk assessment update | |

Appendix 5 – Beyond Swim accreditation process for Swim England Clubs

Steps to become Beyond Swim Accredited

1. Visit: <https://britishtriathlon.formstack.com/forms/beyondswimenrolmentclubs>
2. Fill in the form using the self-declared accreditation option.
3. Complete the **self-declaration checklist**, and send to hello@beyondswim.org.
4. Await further communication from British Triathlon.