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Sport safety guidelines Swimming and Water Safety

Swimming and Water Safety

Aquatic activities play a significant role in the lifestyle of many Australians. It is highly likely that students will be involved in some form of aquatic activity during their schooling. If aquatic activities are to provide beneficial, enjoyable and safe experiences, it is essential that schools make students aware of the importance of water safety and equip students with the necessary skills for safety and survival.

The following resources provide information and risk assessments to assist school communities in the planning of safe swimming experiences for students at a variety of locations.

SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Many schools as part of sport, physical education or special focus programs engage in aquatic activities and conduct programs which may be categorised as:

- Weekly training and instruction sessions which provide for water safety, life saving and advanced swimming programs
- intensive learn to swim and water safety programs.
- Recreational swimming incorporated in sport programs, school excursions and camp situations.

- Surf education initiatives conducted by Surf Life Saving NSW and seaside councils and designed for students training to gain surf qualifications or developed as surf awareness programs.

For all aquatic programs and activities parents must be informed of full details of the location, supervision to be provided and planned activities to be undertaken when seeking their written permission. The permission note must contain a clause authorising medical aid if it is considered necessary by the supervising teacher. The note should also include a section where the parent advises the school of any illness or medical condition that the student suffers from, or any medication the student is currently taking (including asthma sprays, etc). If a student suffers from a medical condition which might put that swimmer at risk in the water, a medical certificate must be obtained for the student to participate in the swimming program.

Parents of students participating in excursions which incorporate aquatic activities must be asked to indicate the swimming ability of their children when giving consent. If parents indicate students are poor or non swimmers, principals will need to assess whether such students should participate in the swimming or water activities. This assessment will need to take into account whether flotation devices can be used to aid the student. This assessment must take place irrespective of parental permission for the students to participate in the swimming or water activities.

For students with disabilities, supervision requirements will vary and need to be assessed accordingly. Particular attention may need to be given to:

- The possible need for integration aides and trained volunteers with specialist expertise and qualifications who might advise on adaptations and improvisation before and during the activities.
- Consideration of fitness levels of participants.
- The need for additional support or safety equipment, such as buoyancy vests.
- Suitability of facilities and access for students in wheelchairs or who have restricted mobility.
- Specific medical needs of students.
- Water temperature and weather conditions.

When epileptic students participate in swimming activities, there must be one supervisor, not necessarily a teacher, for each student in the water. A teacher must always be responsible for the overall supervision of the group.

Students are to be instructed to use adequate sun protection, e.g. as a minimum a SPF50+, broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen reapplied regularly and a hat when not in the water. For outdoor venues, parents and students should be advised to provide a shirt for additional protection in the water. A rash vest is ideal for this purpose.

Teachers planning swimming and water safety activities, either as a special focus program or part of an excursion, need to be familiar with the procedures described in the **Excursions Policy**.

Where adults other than teachers, are engaged to assist school staff in the supervision or instruction of swimming groups, principals should refer to the relevant requirements within the procedures for securing current Working With Children Check.

Sports activities and excursions involving water activities are to be accompanied by a staff member with current training in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and **emergency care** (Memorandum 93/3142). Re-accreditation for CPR is required annually and every three (3) years for the emergency care qualification.

Student Preparation

Students need to be progressively introduced to and taught the skills needed for safe participation. To ensure that students have a safe and enjoyable experience, it is important that their skill levels and abilities are appropriate for the activity and the venue.

The preparation of students to be safe recreational swimmers will vary according to the student's age, ability and experience, the venue and the nature of the proposed swimming activity. Such preparation might include the following types of information and procedures:

- The potential risks of swimming at the selected venue.
- The essential safe practices for swimming at the venue.
- The boundaries of the swimming and out-of-water waiting, rest or playing area.
- How to use swimming aids and other equipment safely.
- Who to notify if leaving or returning to the water.
- Designation of recreation and rest areas when out of the water.
- What to do and or say if approached by an unwelcome member of the public.
- Any limitations to activities or play in the water.
- The sun protection measures that are appropriate.

- The response to any accident or other emergency that might occur.

WEEKLY TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION, SCHOOL INITIATED INTENSIVE LEARN TO SWIM PROGRAMS AND RECREATIONAL SWIMMING AT MUNICIPAL, COMMERCIAL AND SCHOOL SWIMMING POOLS

Supervision

A minimum of two adult supervisors, one of whom must be a teacher, with appropriate expertise and qualifications must be present at all times.

Lifeguards at pools can only be used for supervision and counted in supervision ratios if they do not have general lifeguard duties at the venue at that time and their sole responsibility at the time is to the students in the program.

Principals and organising teachers should take into account such factors as age, ability, experience and maturity of the students and experience of the adult supervisors when arranging supervision. A Supervision Guide appears on page 235.

A major factor when determining 'adequate supervision' that teachers must afford their students in aquatic activities is the swimming ability of the students in the class. Therefore, a reasonable assessment of student swimming ability should be made as close to the commencement of the activity as possible.

The activity supervision plan should include provision for students when they are not swimming. This would indicate where these students should be, what they can do and how they are supervised.

Provision needs to be made for the safe participation of weak or non swimmers. This may involve additional close supervision, restricting participants to shallow water or lanes alongside the pool edge, implementing a "buddy" system or using lane ropes as a safety device. Where other groups receive instruction in water safety, life saving, and advanced swimming, numbers should be limited to ensure that instruction can be carried out effectively and with safety.

Schools should take into account the dangers associated with any congestion at the venue and the associated difficulties involved in providing organised programs of instruction when determining the total number of students attending the activities.

Principals must arrange swimming classes only for the number of students for which suitably qualified staff members are available. When a suitably qualified member of staff is not available (e.g. through sickness), the swimming classes must be reduced by the proportionate number of students unless another suitably qualified teacher is available. Under no circumstances is a group to be left unsupervised.

Appropriately qualified and/or experienced adults may be included in the supervision plan, provided that the principal is satisfied with their ability and qualifications and that there are sufficient teachers to maintain control of the activity and be responsible for supervision.

All teachers must be ready to render assistance in case of an emergency. All supervising teachers should be in swimming attire.

The teacher-in-charge of the program must arrange for all areas of the swimming venue or facility to be supervised, including the changing facilities. Provision should be made for a male and female teacher (or parent if only one teacher) to supervise the respective male and female dressing places. Teachers-in-charge are advised to check with the facility management concerning their particular requirements in this area.

Underwater swimming should be restricted to that required in structured programs and closely supervised.

Teachers-in-charge of student groups must observe the following procedures:

- The roll is to be called immediately prior to the swimming party leaving the school and confirmed on arrival at the swimming facility.
- Students are to be counted and paired at the facility before entering the water.
- Each student is to be instructed to advise the teacher if his or her partner is in difficulties or cannot be located.
- All students in the water must be continuously supervised.
- Students are to be counted immediately the lesson or activity concludes as they leave the water. Teachers must make a thorough check of the water to ascertain that all students have left the pool.
- Teachers are to mark rolls after students have dressed and have congregated near the facility exit. Students are to be marked off the roll as they are dismissed and exit the pool premises. One teacher is to remain inside the venue until all students are marked off the roll and have exited the premises.

- If a student is missing, teachers must check the pool, the pool surrounds and change rooms; inform the pool attendant and the student's parents or caregiver.
- No misbehaviour or unsupervised diving is allowed. Account should be taken of any language difficulty in instructions and directions.
- Under no circumstances is a student to be dismissed or marked off the roll within the facility.

Supervision Guide

Programs / Activity Focus	Supervision	Teacher / Instructor Qualifications & Experience
	Beginners - little or no experience 1:10.	
School initiated intensive learn-to-swim in confined shallow water.	<p>Intermediate - able to achieve basic survival skills 1:12.</p> <p>In addition to providing staff to fulfill instructional requirements, schools should ensure that arrangements have been made for supervision of the pool deck and for students who leave their instructional group for any reason.</p>	<p>Teachers or community instructors engaged to instruct in learn-to-swim classes must possess the AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety or ASCTA Swim Teacher Australia qualification. At least one supervising teacher must possess recognised current training in CPR.</p>
Recreational swimming which may be incorporated in weekly swimming programs, school excursions or activity days.	<p>Schools must arrange for sufficient staff to control the activity. There should be a minimum of two (2) adult supervisors present at all times. All supervisors must have the expertise to implement safety procedures.</p>	<p>At least one of the supervising teachers must possess recognised current training in CPR.</p> <p>At least one supervisor must hold current qualifications in one of the following: AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety or ASCTA Swim Teacher Australia Certificate, RLSSA Bronze</p>

Weekly/intensive training and instruction providing for the teaching of life saving and competitive swimming.	The number of supervising teachers will depend on student numbers and the type of activity and the conditions of the venue.	Medallion, Swimming Teacher Rescue Award, SLSA Patrol Bronze Medallion or SLSA Surf Rescue Certificate.
	However, the supervision ratio must not exceed 1:20.	
	Group size will depend on a number of factors. As a guide, a 1:15 ratio for life saving classes is recommended for swimmers able to swim 25 metres or more confidently using a recognised stroke.	The teachers / instructor must have appropriate expertise and / or training in the teaching / instruction/ coaching of the swimming. At least one of the supervising teachers must possess recognised current training in CPR.

Equipment

The teacher-in-charge must ensure that appropriate rescue equipment, such as buoyancy and reaching aids, are readily available at the venue. Hoists for access to the pool may be required for some students with disabilities.

Regular inspections must be made to ensure that all teaching aids and safety equipment are in good condition. Teaching aids must be stored separately from chemical stores and plant rooms.

A well-equipped medical kit including resuscitation mask with a one way valve must be readily available.

Venues

School, commercial or municipal swimming pools should only be used where facilities are assessed as suitable for the purpose of the activity. For example, sufficient shallow water for the conduct of learn-to-swim programs. Schools, in organising the aquatic activity, are advised to check with the pool management regarding allocation of pool space.

Where school and private pools are used:

- Fencing around pool must conform to Local Council and any other statutory requirements that apply.
- Signage must conform to relevant Australian Standards and meet all statutory requirements that apply.
- Water quality is monitored regularly to meet Department of Health standards.
- Pool, pool deck, fittings and fixtures must conform to any industry or statutory requirements that apply.

The principal and the teacher-in-charge must ensure that where a municipal or commercial pool is not available, the alternative venue has been selected with consideration of the following:

- It is recognised as a safe swimming facility.
- The boundaries of the safe swimming area are defined e.g. a rope or floats or anchored buoys linked with ropes should be used.
- That where instruction of non swimmers is to take place, suitable shallow water is provided.
- Conditions may dictate additional safety requirements and increased supervision to be provided.
- That a supervisor with qualifications in rescue, resuscitation and first aid is present.
- Appropriate rescue equipment is readily available.
- Be free of current, wind and large tidal influences.
- Be free of any hazards both physical and biological.

Safety

The teacher-in-charge must ensure that all staff and students are adequately briefed in water safety and swimming techniques applicable to the lesson or activity, buddy safety system, appropriate communication signals, the cooperative nature of the activity and safe working practice.

The supervising teacher must be aware of the location of all participants in their charge. Procedures for regular, on-going accounting for the number of students in a group should be established. No student is to enter the water without appropriate supervision.

A resuscitation chart(s) and a set(s) of pool rules must be posted in a conspicuous location(s).

A plan detailing emergency response procedures needs to be available for each swimming venue. Where such a plan has been developed by the owners or managers of the venue, staff must be familiar with the plan and be satisfied that it is appropriate for a school group. Where there is no pre-existing plan, the school needs to ensure that a plan is developed and that all instructors, supervisors and students are familiar with it. Plans detailing emergency response procedures should be available at the venue and should include the location and telephone numbers of the nearest emergency services (police, ambulance, hospital).

Emergency assistance equipment must be readily available at the facility.

Schools must take into account the dangers associated with any congestion that may be encountered at the pool and the associated difficulties involved in providing organised programs of instruction when determining the total number of students attending swimming classes.

Schools should check with the respective pool management regarding anticipated numbers and other booking requirements (eg. lane hire) prior to the scheduled classes.

Rules established by the facility controlling authorities regarding behaviour and hygiene must be adhered to and enforced.

Prevention of dehydration is essential during training and competition. Students should be encouraged to consume fluids prior to, during, and on completion of the activity.

Special Feature

The Royal Life Saving Society - Australia and Surf Life Saving Australia offer to teachers and students a comprehensive range of courses and programs for water safety, swimming, survival, lifeguarding and resuscitation. Of particular interest to all schools will be the very successful Swim and Survive and Surf Survival programs.

High Schools may also wish to take their students through the Bronze Award Scheme. Each program enables students to gain awards for performing simulated rescues and demonstrating various survival, swimming and rescue techniques.