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The Lifeguarding Experts
Les experts en surveillance aquatique

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Safety Standards for Canadian Swimming Pools and Waterfronts Swimming Pool Standard

Bather Admission Standard

Standard

Every public pool should implement the Bather Admission Standard for all recreational swim periods, to include:

- Preschool children should be directly supervised by a parent or caregiver who should remain within arm's reach.
- Children who are non-swimmers or who cannot pass the facility swim test should be supervised by a parent or caregiver who remains within arm's reach at all times.
- Weak or non-swimmers should be advised to remain in shallow water, and in the case of children, be directly supervised.

Definitions

Bather: a person whose intent is to use the swimming facility.

Caregiver: an individual, such as a parent, foster parent, teacher or babysitter, fully responsible for attending to the needs of a child or dependent adult.

Direct supervision: maintaining continual eye contact on deck and in water; able to alert lifeguards.

Recreational swim: any period of time where bathers' activities in the pool are not under the direction or supervision of a coach or instructor. These times may include, but are not limited to events such as birthday parties, day camps, free swims, lane swims, open swims, public swims, rentals, teen swims, etc.

Swim test: a measure of swimming competence determined by the facility owner/operator and supervised by aquatic personnel or staff member.

Within arm's reach: able to render immediate assistance and make immediate physical contact.

Rationale

- Children lack judgment and experience to understand the dangers of water.
- Drowning research shows that unattended children are at higher risk of drowning in unstructured swim settings.
- Drowning statistics from unsupervised and supervised settings show that children between the ages of 6 and 9 years of age, who are unaccompanied and who cannot swim, are at the highest risk of drowning.
- Preschool children are generally not able to stand unassisted in most public pools.
- The safety of bathers at pools is a shared responsibility common to stakeholders such as: the pool owner(s), operator(s), lifeguard(s), caregiver(s), parent(s) and event organizer(s).
- Prior to entry, the pool operator should educate users on admission to the pool and the safe use of the facility.
- When determining criteria for a pool admission policy, pool management should ensure the application of the Bather Admission Standard.
- Parents, guardians, and caregivers need to be responsible for applying and abiding by the bather admission standard, pool admissions policy and pool safety regulations; lifeguards are responsible for bather surveillance.

Implementation

The Bather Admission Standard is a critical detail to any swimming pool admission policy. To effectively implement the Bather Admission Standard for recreational swim periods, owner/operators should also evaluate levels of risk. The following minimum criteria should be considered:

- Pool depth(s)
- Pool size
- Ease of access to the pool
- Design of swimming pool: elevations, blind spots, water features, etc.
- Environmental influences: glare, distractions, etc.
- Bather load(s)
- Equipment available and in use
- Activities
- Number of lifeguards on duty
- Ratio of caregivers to children
- Swimming skill level of children (competency)
- Flotation devices – PFDs, lifejackets, buoyancy belts, flotation collars, etc.

A swimming pool's admission policy should include the following:

- Bather age requiring a responsible individual to accompany a child
- Maximum number of children allowed per responsible individual
- Definition of responsible individual

- Guidelines for the use of flotation equipment
- A swim skill requirement
- A visual identification system of swim competency
- A serious medical conditions admission policy

A swimming pool's admission policy should be included in the Pool Safety Plan, where applicable. To ensure effective application of the pool's admission policy:

- All pool staff should be familiar with the Bather Admission Standard and the pool admission policy.
- All staff should be trained and gain practical experience in the application of the policy.
- Lifeguards should be trained and proficient in dealing with unaccompanied bathers who should be supervised.
- Group leaders should be informed of the Bather Admission Standard, pool admission policy, facility safety rules, and emergency and evacuation procedures.
- Signs educating bathers on the Bather Admission Standard and the pool's admission policy should be clearly posted at the facility entry point, in all change rooms, and on the pool deck.

Implement a facility swim test for access to deep water.

- Facility swim tests are an effective safety measure that reduces drowning and need for rescue response.
- All staff should be trained and familiar with swim test evaluation.
- The swim test should be applied to all bathers participating in all unstructured activities, including user groups.
- An effective swim test system should then provide visual identification of swim competency so at-risk-swimmers can be effectively monitored by lifeguards.
- Post conspicuous signage to educate bathers of the facility swim test.
- Ensure all user groups are aware of the facility swim test and are thereby able to help expedite the swim test.

The effective application of the Bather Admission Standard along with a clear pool admission policy decreases water-related emergencies. Swim tests support this objective by identifying bather competency, helping lifeguards monitor those most likely to need help. These measures are only effective when clearly understood and communicated prior to pool use. Therefore, education, training, and messaging all play a critical role in safety supervision and drowning prevention. Swimming pool operators are encouraged to invest in strategies that remain clear and contemporary.

References

- Coroner's Inquests recommendations regarding the provision of an admission standard in public swimming pools: Neave Inquiry, Alberta, 2008; Emun Inquest, Ontario, 2009; Ilunga Inquest, Ontario, 2011; Audette Inquest, Ontario, 2012.

- Drowning Review – A review of all accidental drowning deaths in Ontario from May 1st to September 30th 2010, Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario.
- Alert: Lifeguarding in Action, Lifesaving Society Canada.
- Encadrement sécuritaire des groupes d'enfants en milieu aquatique, Gouvernement du Québec, Ministère de l'éducation du loisir et du sport, 2006.
- Canadian Red Cross Aquatic Safety Plan Guide for Aquatic Facilities 2017.
- The Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards In Education <https://Safety.Ophea.Net/Secondary/Interschool/Swimming>
- BC Camping Association - BCCA Accreditation Standards.

Approval

- Approved by Lifesaving Society Canada's Board of Directors on 9 March 2015.
- Revised and approved by Lifesaving Society Canada's Board of Directors on 9 November 2020.

Disclaimer

Lifesaving Society Canada's National Safety Standards are developed using Coroners' recommendations, the latest evidence-based research, and reflect the aquatics industry's best practices at the time the publication was approved.

The purpose of these standards is to encourage swimming pool, waterpark and waterfront owners, managers, operators and regulators to adopt these standards, in order to prevent drownings in aquatic environments.

Lifesaving Society Canada's National Safety Standards do not replace or supersede local, provincial/territorial or federal legislation or regulations, but they are considered the standard to which aquatic facility operators should work towards, in order to enhance safety within their operations and to prevent drowning.