



National  
Guidance

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## Swimming pools

Being able to swim could be lifesaving and so learning to swim is an essential part of any young person's development. However, swimming is a hazardous activity requiring appropriate management and supervision.

This document provides guidance for using swimming pools during off-site visits. It does not supersede any policy or guidance about swimming pools that your employer may have.

This document does not cover:

- The delivery of swimming lessons as part of the PE curriculum, which should follow specialist PE guidance, such as provided by the employer and Association for Physical Education (AfPE).
- The use of an establishment's own swimming pool, which should be covered in the establishment's Pool Safety Operating Procedures (PSOP).

## Deciding to use a pool

The use of a pool **should be clearly identified as part of your visit planning**, never a spontaneous decision. You should consider the following factors.

Is the pool:

- Lifeguarded? (all appropriately qualified e.g. current RLSS Pool Lifeguard)
- Unsupervised (e.g. some hotel pools)?
- Solely for your use?
- Shared or public use?

The nature of the pool in terms of:

- Size.
- Depth and where it shelves.
- Shape (for observation purposes).
- Clarity of the water.
- Covered/outdoor pool (weather considerations).
- Additional features (slides, diving boards, wave machines etc).
- Ease of egress including hoists and emergency exits.
- The grip of the pool side when wet.
- Type of pool walling (tiles can be cracked or sharp-edged).

- Type of chemicals in the water (possible allergies).
- Water outlets at least in pairs protected by grills reducing the possibility of a swimmer being held by suction.
- Temperature of the water (recommended water temperature for recreational swimming in the UK is 27°C - 29°C) – monitor swimmers for getting too cold or too hot).

The safety equipment and resources:

- Available lifesaving equipment.
- Means for summoning help.
- Availability of help or likely time taken for help to arrive.
- Ropes to mark off pool areas.
- Suitability of facilities including for disability changing, toileting and hoisting (in the changing area and for pool access as appropriate).

The competence and qualifications of the visit leadership team.

The swimming ability, water confidence, and any additional needs of the young people (including medical needs).

## Awareness of risk

Preventing incidents is preferable to responding to them. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has identified some simple and sensible steps during planning and preparation, which, when coupled with vigilant supervision, go a long way towards preventing accidents.

Visit plans should address the following concerns identified by HSE:

- Inadequate or inappropriate supervision.
- Prior health problems (e.g. heart trouble, impaired hearing or sight, epilepsy).
- Alcohol or food before swimming.
- Youth and inexperience (half of those who drown are under the age of 15).
- Weak or non-swimmers straying out of their depth.
- Diving into insufficient depth of water (leading to concussion, or injury to head or spine).
- Unruly behaviour and misuse of equipment.
- Unclear pool water, preventing casualties from being seen.
- Absence of, or inadequate response by, lifeguards in an emergency.

## Using a lifeguarded pool

All UK swimming pools should have a Pool Safety Operating Procedure, including the Normal Operating Procedure (NOP) and the Emergency Action Plan (EAP). These documents should be referred to when carrying out the visit-specific risk assessment and all members of the leadership team should be familiar with any relevant parts. Where the same swimming pool is visited regularly, the establishment's generic procedures should take account of the PSOP and the establishment should liaise with the pool management to be updated on any changes.

The Visit Leader must ensure that:

- Clear ground rules are set for participants.
- Everyone involved in supervision from the establishment has a clear understanding of who is responsible for doing what. This includes arrangements for the session, the rules and precautions as well as their role in an emergency. The pool lifeguard(s) should deal with any emergency occurring in the water.
- Relevant information about individual, medical or special needs is shared in accordance with the PSOP - this may include with the pool management and the lifeguards. Any medication that may be needed in an emergency is accessible.

Visit Leaders should actively monitor their young people and the activity. This may be from the poolside, or from appropriate viewing position(s). A key to arrangements for effective lifeguarding is informing the pool management of the intention to visit so that they can be prepared to accommodate the group and ensure sufficient numbers of lifeguards.

When monitoring activity, Visit Leaders should look for good practice among lifeguards including:

- Vigilance and concentration – Lifeguards should not be distracted from their job of watching the pool users.
- Positioning – all areas of the pool and poolside must be observed and supervised by the lifeguards. They must also be able to see below the water. This ability may be affected by water depth, pool width, water clarity, ambient lighting, glare from sunlight, turbulent water.
- Visibility - as a minimum it must be possible to see the body of a small child if it were located on the floor of the pool in the deepest water.
- 10:20 system should be in evidence – lifeguards should be able to scan their zone within 10 seconds and get to an incident within 20 seconds.
- Length of time on duty – lifeguards should rotate round other pool duties periodically to ensure they remain fresh.

It is the responsibility of the pool management to manage their lifeguards. However, if visit leaders become unhappy about any of the above then they should stop the activity.

## Using an unsupervised pool

Swimming pools in hotels or abroad will have varying levels of safety and facilities. Any use of such a facility must comply with your employer's requirements (including approval if needed) and **should be a clearly identified aspect of the visit planning**, not spontaneous.

When planning to use an unknown pool for the first time the Visit Leader must consider the factors above but also assess any risks inherent in the design of the pool such as:

- Slip trip or fall hazards from steps, edges, uneven or wet surfaced.
- Entrapment hazards from grilles, ladders etc.
- Hazards from sharp or damaged surfaces, edges or railings.
- Unexpected sudden changes of water depth.

- Cleanliness of the water.

The Visit Leader should talk to the manager about pool procedures, Arrangements for safe use of the pool and equipment, what to do in the event of injury, fire, and other emergencies must be clear.

Where the pool has no lifeguard cover, the Visit Leader must decide if suitable safety supervision can be provided from the group's own resources. A minimum level of: water confidence, water safety awareness, and a current First Aid qualification which includes resuscitation/CPR may be sufficient to supervise a group in a simple shallow pool where the visit leaders could not be out of their depth. It would be good practice for visit leaders to test that they can retrieve an object from the bottom of a pool. In such a situation it would be preferable for the group to have sole use of the pool or for the group to stay in one area of the pool. Where there is a very small group all engaged in the same activity it may be possible to supervise from in the water. In all other cases supervision should be led from the poolside.

Where the pool is deep enough to create any possibility of the need to carry out a 'swimming' rescue of a casualty then it is essential that someone in the group has **assessed, current competence** to do this and is designated as lifeguard. This is likely to be the case where the water depth exceeds 1.5m. Lifeguarding must be that person's sole activity – they must not be involved in the pool activity, or responsible for the wider supervision of anyone not swimming. The designated lifeguard could be an appropriately qualified young person but in this case a member of the Visit Leadership team must retain overall supervision responsibility at the poolside to guarantee appropriate levels of behaviour.

## Jumping and Diving

Jumping and diving into water creates additional safety and management issues and should be allowed only in the context of a well organised and disciplined lifeguarded session. Allowing jumping and diving should involve a positive decision not an assumption.

If jumping and diving is to be allowed:

- Visit Leaders should comply with any PSOP and pool notices about diving but may choose to strengthen these arrangements depending on their group.
- Advice from HSE is that the requirements for allowing shallow diving are:
  - 1.5m minimum depth of water
  - 7.6m minimum forward clearance or 'run out'
  - 0.38m maximum freeboard (pool surround above water height).
- There must be no swimmers in the area of entry.
- Divers should not wear goggles.
- For recreational and un-programmed swimming, only flat racing dives should be permitted (unless in a deep water diving pool).
- Divers' footing must be secure at the edge of the pool (standing dives, toes over the edge - not running dives).
- Prolonged underwater swimming after a dive is discouraged.

The following types of water entry should be prohibited during a recreational swimming session:

- Running dives/jumps.
- Backward dives.
- Dives without hands in front of head.
- Indiscriminate diving.
- Somersault entries.
- 'bombing'.

