

How Safe are Your Pools?

Do you have competent and confident swimmers in your pool?

Swimming is fun for people of all ages. Children especially enjoy getting into the water. Unfortunately, drowning is still one of the most common causes of accidental death in children. According to the CDC, 10 people die every day from drowning. Twenty percent of the drowning deaths are children under the age of 14. Learning to swim is a life-long skill and knowing how to swim may save your life one day. Therefore, pool operators need to build a culture of safety. Swim testing is an integral part of operating a safe pool. Lifeguards need to remember that child swimmers who appear to be water confident aren't always competent swimmers. An online dictionary defines lifeguard as "an expert swimmer employed to rescue people who get into difficulty in a swimming pool or at the beach." Therefore, it's important for lifeguards to be proactive instead of reactive. And all swimmers who enter the pool, especially children, need to be confident and competent swimmers.

Swim testing

A swim test must be an integral part of your aquatics program. Good swimmers are generally at lesser risk of serious mishaps in the water than poor swimmers. We've worked with many aquatics facilities that have a swim testing policy of some sort. Some of these facilities have swim tests that are easy to pass, especially during summer camp season. If the swim ability test is too easy to pass, swimmers that aren't proficient in their ability to swim will be in all areas of the pool, in particular the deep end. If a lifeguard is to anticipate potential issues, it makes sense to reduce the risk of having a non-swimmer in the deep end. If we want our lifeguards to be proactive, a structure must be in place to assess the swim ability of every child who enters the pool.

The American Red Cross' recommendations for water competency provide a good starting point for assessing minimum swim skills for common pool environments. These skills include entering the water and resurfacing, control breathing, floating, treading water, turning, and exiting. According to WaterSafetyUSA.org, anyone lacking these basic skills should be closely supervised, stay in shallow water, wear a life jacket, and seek instruction. As a reminder: a person just able to meet the American Red Cross' criteria for water competency is still a novice, not a good swimmer.

Re-visit your swim test policy to make certain your swimmers – most importantly, children – are capable and knowledgeable before they can swim on their own in the pool. Confidence in swimming is not only an important boost for the child, it can also help your lifeguards be more confident about the swimming abilities of all swimmers in the pool. Your facility must have the appropriate safeguards in place. And this starts at the beginning with a stronger and more structured swim testing policy.

Swim age guidelines – Establishing best practice

Swimmers age 16 and under must complete a swim skills assessment and be assigned a swim band to wear each time they come to the pool. As a Best Practice, all children 16 years and younger must take a swim test each time they visit your aquatic facility and want to use the deep end of the pool.

Red Swim Band – All non-swimmers must have in-water supervision and a Coast Guard-Approved Personal Floatation Device (PFD)

Those who do not pass the swim test or decline to take the test are marked with a red swim band.

- All non-swimmers must wear a Coast Guard approved PFD and be with an attentive parent who can swim well. Otherwise, both the parent and child will be restricted to the shallow end of the pool. Parents must actively supervise their child(ren) and remain within arm's reach.
- Youth who have not passed the swim test may not go down slides or use pool diving boards, regardless of the presence of a parent or the use of a personal flotation device.

Yellow Swim Band – Must remain in shallow water (up to armpit deep)

Shallow Water Test: To swim without an adult in water shallower than the swimmer's armpits or in the designated shallow end, the swimmer must pass the Shallow Water Swim Test. Steps required for a yellow wristband:

- Enter water to armpit depth.
- Float on back for 30 seconds, then regain vertical position on their own.
- Swim half of the length of the pool unassisted and swim back unassisted on stomach.
- Swimmers who pass the shallow water test may play in water that's armpit deep or lower.

continued...

Green Swim Band – Can go anywhere in the pool

Deep Water Test: To swim in water deeper than the swimmer’s armpits, the swimmer must pass the Deep-Water Swim Test. The swim test consists of a 25-yard swim, without assistance, starting in shallow end of the pool. Requirements are:

- Jump into the pool, submerge fully, return to the surface, and immediately begin swimming without pushing off the wall. Swimmer must remain horizontal on top of water and have some level of proficiency of the swim stroke. Child must exhibit comfortability and safety in the water. Underwater swimming is not permitted. *Type of stroke allowed – freestyle front crawl or breaststroke.*
- At the end of the 25-yard swim, the swimmer must tread water for 60 seconds with ears and face above water.
- Transition from treading to a front float for 30 seconds.
- Swimmer must exit pool without the assistance of steps or ladder. *Swimmer needs to know how to get out of water in case of fatigue where there might not be a ladder or stairs.*
- Finally, to test confidence in deep water, swimmer jumps into deep end of pool, resurfaces, and exits swimming pool by steps, ladder, or side.
- Swimmers who have completed requirements of swim test must wear the wristband or neckband at all times while in the pool.
- Passing the swim test once does not automatically mean the child will pass it every time. Swim skills vary depending on frequency. The child must exhibit swim skills for each visit they to use the deep end of the pool. Lifeguards conducting the swim test will make the decision based on safety for the child AND for the staff.

Age of Child	Passes Swim Test	Does NOT Pass Swim Test
Infant-7 years old	Access to all areas of pools Adult must be in the water within arm’s length and actively supervising at all times (1:2 ratio)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to shallow, roped-off areas of pools only • Adult must be in the water within arm’s length and actively supervising at all times at all times (1:2 ratio). • Must wear PFD at all times except if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Child passes armpit depth height test for a roped-off portion of pool -Adult accompanying child is actively engaged in teaching swim skills
8-12 years old	Access to all areas of pools Adult may leave the pool deck but not the facility while child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to shallow, roped-off areas of pools only • If child passes an armpit depth height test, they may swim in that roped-off portion of pool without an adult as long as an adult remains in the facility while they swim. • In all other instances, adult must be in the water within arm’s length at all times (1:2 ratio) and child must wear a PFD unless accompanying adult is actively engaged in teaching swim skill.
13-18 years old	Access to all areas of pools Adult not required to be in facility with child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to shallow, roped-off areas of pools only • If child passes an armpit depth height test, they may swim in that roped-off portion of pool without an adult in the facility. • In all other instances, adult must be in the water within arm’s length at all times (1:2 ratio) and child must wear a PFD unless accompanying adult is actively engaged in teaching swim skills.