

Swim England Return to Club Open Water Training

This position is current as of 21 July 2020 but will be amended in light of new information emerging.

Currently up to six people from different households can meet in an outside environment. This will allow for a maximum coach to swimmer ratio of up to 1:5.

It is permissible for clubs to organise a session that has two or more groups of six plus a coach involved, as long as:

- the groups are kept separate
- everyone from different households is social distancing
- strict hygiene measures are in place
- the club complies with this guidance and any relevant government guidance.

The above ruling will remain in place for sessions involving adult participants. However, it is now possible for clubs to run open water training sessions for under 18's in groups of 15 (plus coaches).

The club and coach must continue to risk assess their sessions to ensure that the appropriate coach/ athlete ratios are in place relative to the participants and the nature of the activity.

Our position must be considered against our remit as the recognised national governing body. Swim England continues to closely monitor the Covid-19 Pandemic through official sources, including the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health England (PHE) and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO).

A framework for Club Open Water Swimming in an open water environment

This is not intended to be exhaustive in covering every possible scenario but aims to provide a clear direction of travel for the return of open water swimming within a Swim England Affiliated Swimming Club environment.

SH₂OUT is referred to within the document, it is a partnership between Swim England, British Triathlon, and RLSS UK which has been developed to promote and progress open water swimming and safety within the sport.

Swim England Affiliated Swimming Clubs Return to Open Water Swimming/Training

Planning your return

1. The club must appoint a Covid-19 Officer (preferably a person with Health and Safety experience) who will be responsible for:
 - oversight of the Covid-19 risk assessments and recording/storage of these
 - ensuring the necessary level of risk mitigations are in place
 - ensuring compliance with social distancing guidance
 - swimmers, staff and any partners/hosts adhere to this guidance
 - ensuring adherence to this guidance document
 - ensuring any facility used is following Government Guidelines.
2. We recommend you swim in an operated and supervised open water venue.
 - You can find a list of accredited **SH₂OUT venues**.
A SH₂OUT accredited venue is one that has had its documentation, procedures, water safety provision and operations approved by SH₂OUT in 2019.
 - **Swim England list of open water venues.**
 - **Another list of open water venues.**
 - Please note that Swim England / SH₂OUT do not endorse or promote swimming at these venues, and cannot guarantee the level of safety at these venues.
3. You should never allow athletes to train/swim alone and for any groups containing one or more under 18-year-old swimmers there must be an appropriately qualified coach present (see below).
4. For groups entirely made up over 18-year-olds, who are all club members and who want to train in a session under the auspices of the club we strongly recommend that there is an appropriately qualified coach leading the session. If there is not, then the club must ensure that it has complied with all other guidance (both recommendations and directives) within this document and that appropriately qualified safety and lifeguard personnel are present. Participating members must sign a consent recognising that there will not be a coach present.
5. We recommend you contact the venue you plan to use prior to arrival to ensure that the venue is open and operating swimming. Some venues will require a pre-booking prior to swimming to enable them to maintain social distancing at their venue and whilst swimming.

6. We recommend the coaching staff and Covid-19 Officer visit the chosen venue prior to the first training session. This will aid session planning and health and safety considerations.
7. It is the club's and swimmers' responsibility to ensure that those taking part are sufficiently fit and healthy to participate in open water swimming. You should think about any pre-existing medical conditions that your athletes may have and if you are in any doubt, we recommend they do not train/swim. If a swimmer has recovered from Covid-19 we strongly recommend they receive a medical check up to ensure they are fit to swim.
8. There are no RNLI lifeguards operating presently and therefore we do not recommend sea-swimming. Volunteer lifeboat crews are fully operational but those partaking in sea swimming must understand the risks and take the necessary steps to keep themselves safe. To that end, clubs must ensure that appropriately qualified and recognised safety personnel are in attendance and all other guidance is followed and risk assessments undertaken if sea-swimming is to take place under the auspices of the club. Continue to look to the [RNLI advice for sea swimming](#).
9. The Pool Lifeguard qualification will not qualify a person to undertake an open water rescue. If you do not have the appropriate qualification and you have to carry out an open water rescue your Swim England insurance policy will be void. We recommend you use the venue's qualified lifeguards and safety personnel.
10. The coach must have an appropriately recognised open water coaching qualification, such as the SEQ Level 2 Coaching Open Water Swimming Qualification, if this is not the case then the Club's Swim England insurance policy will be void.
11. If the venue or the Club cannot provide the appropriately qualified lifeguard and safety cover, the Club must not access any body of water for training or any other open water activities.
12. All participating swimmers or their parents should sign a consent/release waiver acknowledging the additional risks related to Covid-19 whilst taking part in Club open water training/activities. The venue may also ask for additional information.
13. We recommend in a body of water with a water temperature below 20 degrees a wetsuit should be worn. Do not breach social distancing guidelines to zip up another's wetsuit.
14. We recommend swimmers taking part in the open water training must be aged 12-years-old and over and be an experienced open water swimmer (has taken part in club open water training/activities prior to lockdown or county and above domestic and/or international open water governing body competitions).
15. Do not allow any swimmer to take part in an open water swimming activity if they have:
 - any symptoms of Covid-19
 - recently been in contact with someone who has displayed Covid-19 symptoms
 - seen a doctor recently regarding Covid-19 symptoms.

On arrival at venue

1. We recommend a review of the body of water is completed prior to club open water training/activities, considering water temperature, safety considerations (water quality, visibility, access/exit points, current, drainage, source of water and expected water conditions, man-made and natural obstacles).
2. Review the venue's safety procedures and cover, these may have changed since your last venue visit.
3. You must complete a dynamic risk assessment for every visit to the venue used.
4. Planning your entry to and exit from the water prior to swimming is vital
5. Any pre or post session activities must be carried out in accordance with social distancing guidance.
6. The club must discourage swimmers from gathering in large groups to socialise. Arrive on time at the venue, but do not arrive earlier than necessary.
7. The lead coach must carry out a pre-session briefing which is robust fit for purpose includes safety arrangements. All swimmers and staff must attend these briefings. Social distancing guidance must be adhered to.
8. If you place staff around the prescribed course, consider how you will communicate with each other i.e. two way radios, mobile phone, etc.
9. Coaches, swimmers and parents must follow social distancing guidelines at all times.

Equipment

1. For all open water swimming below 20 degrees, the wearing of a full body wetsuit is recommended. Wetsuits provide insulation against the cold, which improves cold water tolerance and will extend the time a swimmer can remain (comfortably) in the water.
2. Clear goggles are recommended for cloudy days and anti-glare for sunny days. They allow you to see underwater obstructions and sight effectively.
3. A high visibility swim cap again can help with visibility, which is important if there are other users on the body of water.
4. A whistle to attract attention if someone gets into difficulty.
5. If temperatures (water/air) are low ensure swimmers take a towel, warm clothes (including hat and gloves) and a hot drink for post training.
6. We recommend that coaching staff have access to binoculars and communication devices.

7. Ensure you have the necessary number of boats/accompanying safety persons for the number of swimmers you have training, maintaining a maximum of 1:20 ratio (or for as many swimmers as the current government guidance allows). Check with the venue for the availability of craft/personnel).
8. Ensure there is a supply of appropriate hand wipes/sanitizers for use by your athletes and staff.
9. We recommend the club should supply face masks and gloves for general first aid and do not share these.

Note

If you are supplying your own lifeguards please read the following RLSS guidance carefully. You must ensure you keep your lifeguards as safe as possible whilst performing a rescue, ensuring they are competent do so this in the current climate and have the correct PPE.

[Resuscitation Council UK Statement on Covid-19 in relation to CPR and resuscitation in first aid and community settings.](#)

Water quality

The open water environment is not sterile; there will always be some micro-organisms present. This means that there is always a small chance of becoming ill if people come into contact with these organisms. Various factors influence bathing water quality, including, the presence of cattle grazing in the area near the water, as run-off water can carry pathogens (harmful micro-organisms) from cattle on to the beach via streams running into the sea. Other risk factors include the presence of flocks of birds, proximity to a busy harbour, wind, currents and tides. Risks are increased during times of heavy rainfall, as run-off water can increase the number of pathogens. More detailed information and advice can be found in the **[PHE document: Swim Healthy.](#)**

Weather conditions and water temperature

1. Different types of weather can lead to additional risks which you need to be aware of:
 - In hot weather, there can be a significant difference between the air and water temperature.
 - Strong winds can also make swimming conditions difficult, water can become unsettled, wavy and add wind chill, so you may get colder than you expect.
 - You should never swim if there is any danger of an electrical storm.
 - Both high and low water temperatures can put significant stress on swimmers putting their health at risk.
 - When open water swimming, the colder the water and air temperature, the quicker you will cool down: the colder it is the less time you should spend in the water.
2. FINA recommends that all open water competitions should take place in water at 16 degrees or above.

3. SH₂OUT recommends that all open water swimming should take place in water at 11 degrees or above. At temperatures lower than this we do not recommend open water swimming. The reason for this is swimmers can experience a cold-water shock response when entering water, be mindful this can also happen above 11 degrees.

Entry and exit

1. Planning your exit is just as important and something that is often overlooked. Prior to entry, you should ensure swimmers can easily exit the water and make sure they have access to their towel and warm clothing quickly. Remember to take into account currents and tides.
2. Swimmers need to be able to enter the water slowly in a safe way that allows them to acclimatise to the water temperature – 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 they panic and need to exit. Swimmers also need to ensure they can find clear water and maintain social distancing keep from the person(s) they are swimming with at all times.
3. To acclimatise we recommend that you (the swimmer):
 - Immerse yourself slowly up to knees/hips.
 - Splash face, if wearing a wetsuit put water down the arms and front.
 - Whilst you can stand up slowly sink up to your shoulders.
 - Put your face in the water and blow bubbles.
 - Take some deep breaths and wait until any cold shock has passed.
 - Start swimming slowly and only when ready.
4. If you become nervous or uncomfortable, roll on to your back and float. Breathe deeply until you regain control.

Training session

1. Ask yourself do you have an experienced accompanying safety person (kayaking alongside) that is experienced and holds the appropriate qualifications in lifesaving? (If the venue will not allow coaching staff to access the body of water we recommend you use the venues “on water” safety personnel).
2. It is important to consider underfoot conditions leading to the entry point – to avoid risks of cuts and grazes. Ask swimmers to wear shoes as close as possible to the water’s edge and look out for sharp stones or broken glass.
3. The route the swimmers will be using must be visible at all times by the coach and/or safety personnel.

4. There must be separate entry and exit routes which allow for social distancing. Take extra care to maintain social distancing when arriving at these potential choke points.
5. Social distancing guidance must be adhered to whilst in the water and on land.
6. Ensure your Covid-19 Officer has reviewed these specific requirements and confirmed all items have been completed/met satisfactorily.

Post training

1. Once the training session has finished and swimmers have safely exited the water, we recommend they dry off and dress immediately. It is advisable to put on warm clothes, including a hat and gloves. This is to reduce the risk of athletes suffering from “after drop”, which is the lowering of their core temperature.
2. 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.
3. If possible, it is advised to get into a sheltered spot to ensure swimmers are protected from any wind or chill. This could be the car they arrived in. Again, ensure everyone maintains social distancing as the swimmers exit and whilst they are preparing and carrying out their post session routines.
4. Limit contact with other swimmers and surfaces, it is our current recommendation to prepare to leave the venue as soon as athletes have completed their post training routines.
5. Recommend swimmers have a hot drink as soon as possible after training. This will help to maintain body temperature. A post training snack should also be available, as they would after a pool training session. Before athletes eat or drink, wash hands using sterilising wipes or gels.

Cleaning yourself and equipment

1. We recommend when athletes return home they shower (venue changing room and shower facilities may not be open) in fresh water at the earliest opportunity and again put on lots of warm clothes. This will remove all microbes, many of which are able to survive on the skin surface for long periods.
2. Swimmers and staff should rinse and wash all their kit in fresh water before drying thoroughly – including wetsuit, goggles, swim hat and swimming costume.

Aftercare

1. If any athletes or staff feel ill post session seek medical advice by calling 111 – including rashes for up to three weeks following a swim. Highlight that you have been swimming in open water and tell the operator the location that you swam in.

“Club” refers to a Swim England Affiliated Swimming Club.

Additional Resources:

- Up to date **Government Guidance related to Covid-19** can be found here
- **Covid-19 General Guidance to Open Water Swimmers** is being hosted on the **SH2OUT website**.
- **Key safety advice for open water swimmers.**
- **Open water guidance for venues.**