

# The Importance of Pools Post-lockdown

## Disclaimers:

- This position is current as of 7 May 2020 but will be amended in light of new information emerging.
- 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).

## Framing our position

The health and social impacts of closing aquatic centres and swim schools are significant.

- Around 14 million adults in England go swimming each year (31.3 per cent of the population). More than one million children learn to swim outside of school through Swim England's Learn to Swim programme each year.
- The proven physical and mental wellbeing benefits of swimming are extensive and include increased cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength and endurance, as well as reduced stress and anxiety.
- Swim England notes the economic impacts of Covid-19 on aquatic centres and swim schools continue to be significant. Swim England estimates that more than 5,000 swimming pools, many of which are owned by local councils, and more than 2,000 swim schools, including many small businesses, have been closed.
- Swim England estimates that approximately 67,000 are in paid employment in the sector.
- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been helpful for many business, charities and employees in the sector.

Balancing public health measures and economic considerations with our love of swimming and strong desire for a roadmap back to aquatics is challenging. There are few in our industry that do not want a return to normal operations in the weeks ahead (provided it is safe to do so).

## Social value of a pool

Swimming pools contribute significantly to the social value of a local community, and society.



When just focusing on the savings to health and social care, a **25m pool** can save the NHS and our social care system more than **£1.22million**<sup>2</sup>

## Value of swimming

Swimming is incredibly valuable. It is valuable for the individual, local communities and society, saving millions of pounds each year. This will be more important than ever following the extended period of lockdown where opportunities for engaging in physical activity (particularly for individuals who may struggle to exercise on land) has been reduced.

Whilst Swim England understands the recent impact on the public purse, it would be a short-sighted view to not invest in swimming pools today which we know will have a bigger, long-term impact on the health and wellbeing of our society.

- Swimming saves the health and social care system more than £357 million pounds per year.
- Of this, more than £139 million pounds of savings alone are made in dementia health and social care.
- More than £51 million is down to reduced GP and psychotherapy visits of adult swimmers (16+) compared to non-swimmers.
- With 70 per cent of the NHS budget being spent on chronic diseases, increased swimming participation would further ease the pressures on health and social care spending.
- 1.4 million adults feel that swimming had significantly reduced their symptoms of anxiety and or depression.
- Swimmers also report feeling on average 6.4 per cent healthier than non-swimmers – this is comparable to feeling 12 years younger.



**of the NHS budget goes on chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease**

## Relevant research

Research is currently being carried out across the globe on the contamination time of Covid-19 in a replicable swimming pool environment. This scientific information, alongside government guidance, will inform our guidance on how facilities could operate during the current pandemic.

## Swim England role in pools reopening

Swim England has provided guidance on a framework for re-opening pools – this guidance will sit within a framework for leisure facilities which UK Active is producing. This is guidance based on the government's current recommendations around social distancing and hygiene.

In addition, Swim England is, and will be, working with key partners and colleagues in the sector to set out specific guidance for each of our disciplines and activities including learn to swim, instructor-led classes and recreational swimming.

Guidance and recommendations will be different for each of our activities and disciplines. It will also differ depending on the audience, i.e. elite athletes, club athletes, general participation and competitions.

The overriding factor will be safety. Whilst it will be wonderful to get back in the pool doing what we love, we must bear in mind that the health and wellbeing of everyone is the most important factor.

## Economic considerations to reopening

Economic considerations include the fact that:

- Family budgets are likely to be impacted by loss of, or reduced, employment.
- Council budgets will be impacted by loss of income (rates), reduced investment performance and financial pressures related to retaining key staff and other pressures on budgets.
- Business operators have had to underwrite capital, fixed, energy and some workforce costs during this period of inactivity.

Swim England expresses its concern that the sector will require further assistance in order to achieve the transformation required to be successful in a post-Covid-19 environment. Specifically, its concerns relate to the following key questions:

- How do we best ensure that communities have facilities that meet their needs for learn to swim, clubs, fitness and good health, which will provide significant social value?
- How do we support a workforce that provides those services?

## Recommendations

Swim England's early responses to these questions calls on Government to:

1. Encourage swimming pool operators and owners to open swimming pools when it is safe to do so.
2. Ensure that swimming pool operators and owners can access the required funding to enable the reopening of facilities to prevent the "mothballing" of pools.

In addition, we also add our support to the Local Government Association's asks:

1. Work with the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government to identify funding for any expenditure councils are forced to make in underwriting their leisure providers as a result of Covid-19.
2. Ensure that leisure trusts qualify for the new £750m grant-based support package for the charity and social enterprise sector.
3. Work with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the utility companies to agree a short-term reduction or waiving of standing charges for energy and water, which forms almost half of ongoing running costs.

## Final word

As we begin to emerge from the Covid-19 lockdown, being active and enjoying the benefits exercise brings will be more important than ever.

We know that swimming improves people's physical and mental wellbeing, supports community cohesion and saves the NHS hundreds of millions of pounds each year. Swimming can tackle a number of the problems facing society, particularly at the moment, in a way that other sports cannot.

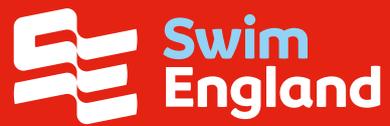
Swimming pools generate huge amounts of social value for their local communities, with people of all ages able to enjoy them. For some, they are the only appropriate environment that enables them to be active and transform their lives.

However, it is clear that facilities have been hit hard by the impact of Covid-19, and there is a real concern that some pools will not reopen.

That is why it is so important that pools are given the necessary support to reopen their doors for people to enjoy once more.

We ask that all partners, stakeholders and the Government support our commitment to reopen pools as soon as it is safe to do so.

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