

## Supervision of Swim Meets

Lifesaving Society Standard Approved by the Ontario Board of Directors, January 2024

### Standard

The ratio of lifeguards to on-deck bathers and participants should be in keeping with the Ontario Public Pools Regulation 565.

### Definitions

**Water:** Any water environment, be it manufactured or natural, which poses the risk of immersion such as a swimming pool, lake, river, pond, etc.

**Deck:** The area immediately surrounding the pool. The deck is 1.87 m (6 ft.) wide.

**General area:** The area adjacent to the deck (but within the pool enclosure) used by the public for activities other than bathing.

**Active lifeguard:** An active lifeguard is on deck, in the meet-designated lifeguard position, scanning the pool, and is appointed by the owner/operator to maintain surveillance over bathers while they are on deck or in the pool and to supervise bather safety.

**Participants:** Includes all people in the pool area such as marshals, coaches, stroke judges, timers, placement judges, meet competitors and starters.

### Background/Rationale

The standard of supervision at swimming pools across Ontario for swim meets and practices was inconsistent and education of non-aquatic professionals about safety supervision in aquatic environments was needed.

Swim meets and practices for all types of swimmers require proper safety supervision and positioning of lifeguards to ensure proper scanning zones and visibility of the bottom of the pool – it is not safe to assume nothing will ever happen.

Swim meet injuries tend to be different from injuries that occur during recreational swims and vary according to the type of swim meet. The National Lifeguard (NL) standard of care must be present.

## Implementation

The following are possible methods of implementing this standard:

1. Plan budget strategies for implementation of the standard.
2. Review history of incidents and accidents that occur during special events and normal operation.
3. Review surveillance requirements for your specific facilities.
4. Review training requirements for special events to include specific injury training for lifeguards, officials and volunteers who participate in swim meets, synchro meets, water polo games, lifeguard competitions, etc.
5. The types of injuries that could occur at swim meets may include, but are not exclusive to:
  - a) Head injuries, face injuries and spinal injuries after a dive start. This has a higher probability of occurring with dives into water that is 1.35 m deep.
  - b) Asthma attacks. These may occur at any point during the race or event. The victim will likely stop and grasp the lane marker during the race.
  - c) Heel and ankle injuries. These occur during front crawl and back crawl races when the swimmer misjudges the distance to the turn wall during a flip-turn.
  - d) Vomiting and faintness. These occur at the end of a race, often due to over-exertion.
  - e) Behavioural problems and falls on deck, showers, viewing area and change rooms. These occur because swimmers are not directly supervised by their coaches in between races. The horseplay occurs in warm-up tanks, shower rooms and change rooms because team members often have long waits in between events and their behavior is unsupervised.

**Note:** Lifeguards will spot injuries a) through d) by paying focused attention on the start, turns and the finishes of every race. Injuries due to item e) are common for guards that supervise special events.

6. Review the World Aquatics rulebook and the Swimming Canada rulebook to ensure all areas of the warm-up guidelines are met. For example, in the warm-up pool, all lanes will be circle swimming with feet-first entry from a sitting position at all times.

When facilities host swim meets or special events, they must ensure the safety of the participants in the water, on the deck and in the general area. Therefore, the training and position of lifeguards for swim meets, including warm-ups, should be based on the nature of common injuries, the location in the pool that the injuries occur, the type of activity, facility design and use of equipment.

Lifeguards are directly responsible for the supervision of the swimming pool at all times that bathers are in the water or on the pool deck. Indirectly, and not considered as a part of the count in determining the number of lifeguards required, are those participants beyond the pool deck area. Lifeguards are not responsible for the supervision of these participants although would likely be called upon to respond if an emergency occurred.

#### **Lifeguard to bather ratios**

The chart below depicts the recommended lifeguard to bather ratio supervision standard (for those bathers in the pool and on the pool deck within 1.87 m of the pool edge):

Number of bathers on deck and in the pool, minimum number of lifeguards and assistant lifeguards on duty:

0–30	1
31–100	2
101–200	3
201–300	4

Greater than 300, one additional lifeguard or assistant lifeguard for each additional 100 bathers, or fraction of 100 bathers.

The number of assistant lifeguards cannot exceed the number of lifeguards on duty.

When a pool with a water surface greater than 500 square metres is open for use, add one to the minimum number of lifeguards and assistant lifeguards required in the table above.

Lifeguards should maintain supervision of their designated zone. Other tasks such as taking water tests, etc., must not be performed by on-duty lifeguards. Lifeguards who go off duty may be required to perform these tasks. Additional lifeguards will be required as the pool size and the

number of competitors increase. The Lifesaving Society recommends operators include this position in their facility policy and procedures manual, and staff handbooks.

All staff should review this position and its application at least once a year during staff training sessions, or better, update and refresher sessions should be scheduled regularly throughout the year. A training record should be maintained listing aquatic staff who have participated in the training.

## References

- *Alert: Lifeguarding in Action*
- Ontario Public Pools Regulation 565

## Disclaimer

Lifesaving Society 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 Safety Standards do not replace or supersede local, provincial/territorial 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.

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