



Safety Management for Open Water Workouts

Swim BC registered programs are permitted to conduct Open Water training where local, regional, and provincial authorities and regulations permit. Clubs must ensure they've received permission and are permitted to conduct training sessions – permission must be granted by the municipal, regional, or provincial authority governing the waterway.

Step 1: Determine who can participate

- All Swimmers MUST BE 11 years or over...
- Swim BC recommends coaches assess baseline swimming competency utilizing the following distance / time guidelines:

Complete 800m in 12:30.00 or less
Complete 1500m in 24:00.00 or less

- Prior to training, Swim BC recommends the club conduct an introductory **Open Water Mini Clinic** for inexperienced, novice and younger participants. Suggested **Mini Clinic** content:

Prior to water entry:

Review tips on how to observe and understand the course:

- ✓ Coach or Safety person explain how to sight, review and understand the course;
- ✓ interact with swimmers to ensure they clearly understand the course layout or swimming area
- ✓ demonstrate what is 'on-course' and what is 'off-course'

Understand obstacles:

- ✓ Coach led discussion on potential obstacles within course.
- ✓ What constitutes an obstacle? Why does it present a risk?
- ✓ Swimmers must be able to successfully articulate to the coach where an obstacle exists

Learn and demonstrate signals:

- ✓ Learn and successfully demonstrate pre-determined "help" and "okay" hand signals.
- ✓ Swimmers successfully demonstrate signals prior to entry to water.

Learn and demonstrate a Panic Plan:

- ✓ Coach or Safety person explain an easy to remember panic plan for swimmers and have swimmers rehearse prior to water entry (e.g. stop, head back, tread water, deep breaths, lay on back, signal coach or safety person with appropriate pre-rehearsed signal)
- ✓ Swimmers successfully demonstrate and recite Panic Plan

Water Skills:

- ✓ Comfortably tread water (minimum 5 mins)
 - Coach or safety person assess swimmers water temperature comfort level during and after treading water
- ✓ Front & Back floating and resting skills
 - Coach or safety person assess swimmer relaxation and ease of breathing
- ✓ Swimmer successfully demonstrates pre-rehearsed Panic Plan
- ✓ Swimmer is able to successfully remove, clear and re-set goggles while treading water
- ✓ Sighting technique practice
- ✓ Successfully demonstrate visual contact with coach and demonstrate set hand signals
- ✓ Swim BC recommends swimmers wear brightly coloured / neon swim caps – no blue, green or black caps



Step 2: Know your venue

- **Permission:** ensure you've obtained the appropriate permission to conduct Open Water training at the venue. This will likely be granted by the municipal, regional, or provincial authority governing the venue / waterway.
- **Water Quality:** make sure that your venue has been checked for water quality and has been approved for bathing as per the BC Governments Recreational Water Quality guidelines. Health Authority "Beach Condition Reports" should also be consulted.
- **Water temperature:** Conduct a water temperature test at 40cm of depth at your planned time for swimming. Many venues can have varying water temperature throughout the day, and you may need to adjust your workout times for optimal water temperature.
 - Swim BC's **minimum temperature is 16 C** and **maximum temperature is 30 C**. Wetsuits should be worn in temperatures below 18.5 C. They can also be worn in higher temperatures based on a swimmer's comfort level. Swimmers are acclimated to a 26.5 – 28 C swimming pool so flexibility should be built into training duration and the use of wetsuits. Swimmers may eventually acclimate to lower temperatures over time, but this process can take several weeks and can only be accomplished by incrementally increasing the time in the water.
- **Boat traffic:** Swim in areas without any motorized boat traffic.
- **Weather Conditions:** strong winds, atmospheric visibility, surf, squall conditions, etc. should all be analyzed prior to a training session. Seek sheltered bodies of water. Consulting weather or marine reports before training is essential. **WHEN IN DOUBT, DO NOT SWIM.**
- **Marine Life:** Ensure you're aware of any marine life in the area.
- **Entry and Exit Points:** Ensure swimmers can safely enter and exit the water, check for hazards such as sharp rocks, shallow areas, drop-offs, litter, slippery areas, etc. Whenever possible use venues with a sandy beach and gradual drop-off. Do not permit dive entries.

Step 3: Have a Safety Plan

- **Safety Personnel:** The primary function of every staff member should be safety and supervision of athletes. A ratio of athlete to safety personnel is not as important as the response time to an athlete. Safety personnel should be able to reach a swimmer in no more than 20 seconds at any given point during the training session.
- **Determine How Swimmers will be Supervised:** Constant and adequate monitoring of swimmers is paramount during the swim. It is recommended to have safety personnel placed in zones throughout the course along with safety personnel following the swimmers while they swim. Safety personnel should not only pay attention to the swimmers but to boat traffic as well.
- **Have Vessels Available for Safety Personnel:** Stand up paddleboards, paddleboards, and kayaks are all effective vessels for monitoring swimmers. It is important to understand how to use your vessel and how to make a rescue if necessary. Supervising while onshore is not a replacement for in the water safety.
- **Have Someone Onshore:** Someone should always be positioned onshore with a cell phone in case of a 911 call.
- **Develop a Communication Plan:** Handheld radios in zip lock bags can be an effective way of communicating amongst safety personnel. Non-verbal communication is also critical in notifying the onshore staff member of a potential emergency.
- **Develop an Emergency Action Plan:** Open water environments are constantly changing so you should have a plan for immediate course evacuation. This should be communicated with all safety personnel and athletes and swimmers should be advised to swim directly to shore if there is a designated emergency signal.



- **Hospital Location:** Map out the location of the nearest hospital and communicate that with the safety personnel.
- **First Aid:** Have a fully stocked first aid kit. Minor bumps, bruises and scratches are common in open water swims.
- **Get a Head Count:** Count the swimmers as they enter and exit the water. Many swimmers will finish at different times, it is important to know how many swimmers are in the water at any given point.

Step 4: Develop a Flexible Workout Plan

- **Designate Your Swimming Boundaries:** Swimmers should always stay within the swimming boundaries to ensure that they are properly supervised.
- **Develop a Course:** Buoys or landmarks can be used to create a course. Circuit or “lap” style courses are effective ways of containing swimmers in the course boundaries while maximizing your “safety personnel”. Additionally, swimming in laps can prevent swimmers from swimming into one another and provides set distances for workout structure.
- **Plan Breaks:** Hydration and snack breaks on shore should be planned. Remember: athletes in the pool can rest between intervals, sets, etc. and this should be planned for during an open water workout.
- **Be Flexible:** Each athlete will respond to open water workouts differently. A 5K pool swim is much easier than a 5K open water swim. Do not get caught up with chasing specific distances initially.

HAVE A SAFE SWIM!