

Swim Safe Programs*

A Reference Guide for Schools

Developed in Collaboration with Seine River School Division



Updated
2021

*The guidelines in this document do not apply to swimming lessons; they do apply to all other aquatic outings including activities like band trips and sporting trips where swimming in a hotel pool may be an incidental activity.



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Les experts en surveillance aquatique*

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August 20, 2021

Re: Manitoba School Boards Association's Swim Safe Program.

The Lifesaving Society Manitoba has reviewed and provided guidance for the Manitoba School Boards Association's *Swim Safe Program: A Reference Guide for Schools* document.

Through the course of our review, we found the document to meet or exceed expected standards, legislation, and industry best practices with respect to safety plans for children engaged in aquatic school outings.

With this endorsement, we encourage all schools in Manitoba to adhere to this document and its intent when planning any form of aquatic outing. This endorsement shall stand for a period of five (5) years from the publication date, or until such time as the document has been updated, whichever comes first.

Sincerely,

Stacey Grocholski, Executive Director
Lifesaving Society Manitoba

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the groups and individuals who lent their time and expertise to the creation of this document.

Our group consisted of volunteers who provided their time to research issues. They relied upon numerous resources to develop the contents of this reference guide. The committee does not assume any responsibility as to how the material in this guide will be used.

Special thanks to the Seine River School Division and its Review Committee on Aquatic Outings for their input.

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Introduction

We all know that swimming is fun and a wholesome activity that is enjoyed by many students. We also know that tragic water accidents happen quickly. The most common reason for water mishaps is lack of knowledge. Teachers, school personnel, and volunteers who take students on outings that involve the water must be particularly vigilant. Preparation is the key to success. Protecting students involves:

- Becoming familiar with this Swim Safe Programs reference guide.
- Planning carefully for the swimming excursion.
- Obtaining and forwarding all necessary documentation.
- Planning and reviewing Swim Day Controls
- Preparing and reviewing an Emergency Action Plan.
- Reviewing Swimmer's Rules and Expectations with students.
- Supervising all aspects of the aquatic outing.

This guidebook provides guidance on how to prepare for and supervise outings at the following aquatic venues:

- A pool supervised by one or more qualified lifeguards .
- A pool not supervised by a lifeguard (e.g. hotel pool).
- A lake or river waterfront.
- A water park (waterslide).

Swimming lesson requirements are not addressed in this guidebook.



How to Use this Guidebook

The guidelines in this document are for all school personnel involved in planning and implementing aquatic outings. They are designed to apply to all Manitoba school boards participating in the Manitoba Schools Insurance Program. Representatives of teachers, swimming organizations, insurance personnel and school trustees have endorsed them.

A necessary component of each outing shall be instruction in all safety procedures appropriate to the aquatic venue (pool, water front, water slide). The safety of all participants must be the most important consideration. Proper planning, experience and common sense should result in a beneficial learning program. **Keep in mind that these water safety guidelines shall also apply to other activities such as band trips, ski trips, hockey trips, etc. where swimming in a hotel pool is possible.**

In this manual we describe basic steps for providing supervision that actively encourages all participants to swim safely while at the same time supporting and enhancing your education program. Those steps include:

- Meeting insurance requirements.
- Providing adequate supervision.
- Completing the *Swim Trip Preparation Checklist*.
- Attending to *Swim Day Controls*.

Insurance Requirements

Group out-of-province medical care coverage for **Staff, Trustees and Volunteers** is provided in conjunction with the Manitoba Schools Insurance Program from broker HUB International (Email msbaschool@hubinternational.com or telephone 1-877-201-6801) to all School Divisions. At present, this coverage provides up to \$1,000,000 of additional protection in the event of required medical care or hospitalization (due to accident or illness) that is not covered under Manitoba Health. Coverage details including type of travel (in Canada or outside of Canada), trip durations, etc. will vary by School Division as coverage levels are confirmed annually at a divisional level. Please contact HUB International to confirm coverage details before booking any trips or traveling.

Group out-of-province medical care coverage for **Students** is available through the Manitoba Schools Insurance Program from broker HUB International (Email msbaschool@hubinternational.com or telephone 1-877-201-6801). Please contact HUB International before booking any trips or travelling.

A signed written agreement outlining each parties duties and responsibilities must be in place before a lifeguard can assume duty on behalf of the division. This agreement triggers the Manitoba Schools Insurance Program to extend liability insurance to the lifeguard for bodily injury by an occurrence that takes place in the scope of their duties on behalf of the School/Division



Providing Active Supervision

School personnel are responsible for providing supervision and maintaining control at all times. Minimum supervision requirements for aquatic outings are presented in the chart below. **If the requirements cannot be met, the event should be cancelled.**

Supervision Requirements for School Aquatic Outings					
Teacher	One for each group of 25 students				
Lifeguard	<p>At least one qualified lifeguard is required. Recommended: One lifeguard for each group of 25 students in or near the water. When determining the number of lifeguards needed, include both lifeguards hired directly by the school to supervise the activity as well as any lifeguards who will be on duty at the venue.</p> <p>All lifeguards must have current certifications; that is, they must have certified no more than two (2) years prior to the day after the end of the event they are supervising.</p> <p>Minimum certifications required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Lifeguard certification (appropriate to the venue being visited, e.g. pool, waterfront, waterpark) • Standard First Aid certification • CPR-C certification (may be included in the standard first aid training) 				
Plus	Additional adult supervisors are required when students are in or near the water.				
	Grade	K	1 to 4	5 to 8	9 to 12
	Adult to student ratio	1 to 4	1 to 6	1 to 8	1 to 12
	<p>When students are in or near the water adult supervisors must position themselves so that the students are in clear sight and they can provide immediate assistance, if required. Normally this will require the supervisors to be at or near the waterline. Where there are students age 6 or under in the water, or any students who are non-swimmers and wearing lifejackets there need to be adult supervisors in the water within arms' reach (that is, the adult can grab the student or the student can grab the adult immediately in case of any trouble) of these students at all times.</p> <p>Note: adult supervisors in the water need to be swimmers, and they need to be competent and comfortable in the water. Hesitant, weak, or non-swimmers will be a major safety issue.</p>				

Overseeing an aquatic outing is a complex task. Among the activities are the following:

- Supervising all activities through staff, volunteers or others.
- Supervising children closely, even when lifeguards are present.
- Knowing and enforcing the rules.
- Warning people about hazards.
- Actively motivating people to participate safely and responsibly.
- Communicating standards of responsible participation through rules of conduct, through positive example and disciplinary action.
- Ensuring that no flotation devices other than approved life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFD's) are used. Any lifejackets or PFDs used for safety purposes during a school activity or event must be in good repair and of an approved type. For more information about approved lifejackets and PFDs, including how to meet approval standards, see Appendix A.
- Reviewing swimmers rules and expectations with all swimmers and supervisors.
- Ensuring that rescue aids appropriate to the activity being undertaken, such as reaching poles, throw ropes, life preservers, etc., are readily available.
- Ensuring that all K-2 students wear approved life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFD's) when in or near the water. All non-swimmers must also wear approved life jackets or PFDs when in or around the water, or be confined to shallow water only or to land depending on the type of activity.

Swim Trip Preparation Checklist

Use the points below to guide your planning activities. Note that planning for your outing may well involve activities beyond those presented. Common sense and good judgment must prevail.

	done	n/a
• Identify an in-charge teacher.	_____	_____
• Arrange for teacher, lifeguard, and adult supervision (see requirements on page 5).	_____	_____
• Pre-visit the venue to determine suitability.	_____	_____
• Obtain a list of venue's rules.	_____	_____
• Receive conceptual approval for swim excursion from administration.	_____	_____
• If trip is out-of-province, organize supplemental medical coverage (as required).	_____	_____
• Book date and numbers with venue.	_____	_____
• Arrange transportation.	_____	_____
• Complete required school board excursion forms and submit for processing as required by the school board.	_____	_____
• Complete parental letter and information package which shall include student classification information.	_____	_____
• Send package home for parental permission and signature.	_____	_____
• Collect signed parental permission forms for each student.	_____	_____
• Establish swim classification groups.	_____	_____
• Arrange for identification bands or ribbons to be used by students while they are at the venue.	_____	_____
• Inform venue of group sizes and abilities and request number of lifeguards required.	_____	_____
• Inform venue that no flotation devices other than approved life jackets or PFD's are permitted.	_____	_____
• Sign facility/venue agreement that describes the rules and responsibilities of both parties.	_____	_____
• Prepare an emergency action plan. See <i>YouthSafe Manitoba: Field Trip Safety for Schools</i> .	_____	_____
• Determine if a swim test is required for the activity in question (canoe trip, sailing excursion, etc.)	_____	_____
• Pre-event swim test of all participants, including adult supervisors and teachers, run as required.	_____	_____
• Location of the nearest automated external defibrillator (AED) unit to the activity venue determined in advance, including how to access the AED in case of emergency.	_____	_____
• How to contact emergency medical and rescue services from all areas of the activity venue determined in advance.	_____	_____
• All adult supervisors briefed on how to contact emergency medical and rescue services.	_____	_____
• After all the above have been completed, meet with students to discuss and establish: teacher/volunteer/student supervision, behavioral expectations, groupings, swim regulations, seating plans, and organizational plans for the event.	_____	_____

Swim Day Controls

The in-charge teacher must make contact with the aquatic venue staff prior to the event in order to arrange swimmer identification and control procedures.

- Before departure, the in-charge teacher will review rules and responsibilities of all staff and volunteers.
- Before departure, review emergency action plan with volunteers and personnel.
- Before departure, ensure that all K, 1, and 2 students and all non-swimmers have government approved life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFD's) that match their size and weight, and remind them that the approved life jackets or PFD's must be worn by them at all times when they are in or near the water.
- Before departure, assign each student to a swim group using the swim classification information provided on the permission form.
- Upon arrival at the site, review the emergency action plan with venue staff and/or activity supervisor.
- Upon arrival at the site, the certified lifeguard(s) will review with the students all safety requirements and features of the venue, along with the appropriate use of all venue equipment such as diving boards, swing ropes, pool slides, etc.
- At the venue, the in-charge teacher will, along with the venue staff, emphasize to the students that once they receive permission to use a specified area of the pool, they **MUST NOT** go in areas beyond their ability.
- At the venue, certified lifeguards will conduct the swimming ability test or "Swim to Survive" test. Venue staff, assisted by the school personnel, will then distribute appropriate identification tags or ribbons to all the students.
- Once students have been assigned ability levels, pair them off using the buddy system. When a whistle or similar communication device sounds, each pair will find one another and stay in one place until instructed otherwise. This system should be tested every fifteen minutes. Each student should keep an eye on his or her "buddy" throughout the activity.
- Where change rooms or locker rooms are used, ensure that adequate supervision is provided.

Lifeguards

At least one qualified lifeguard is required. Recommended: One lifeguard for each group of 25 students in or near the water. When determining the number of lifeguards needed, include both lifeguards hired directly by the school to supervise the activity as well as any lifeguards who will be on duty at the venue.

All lifeguards must have current certifications; that is, they must have certified no more than two (2) years prior to the day after the end of the event they are supervising.

Minimum certifications required:

- National Lifeguard certification (appropriate to the venue being visited, e.g. pool, waterfront, waterpark).
- Standard First Aid certification.
- CPR-C certification (may be included in the standard first aid training).

A signed written agreement outlining each parties duties and responsibilities must be in place before a lifeguard can assume duty on behalf of the division (See Insurance Requirements).



Sample Letter to Parents and Students

Note: This letter is required for all school outings where aquatic activities are possible. This includes band trips and sporting trips where swimming in a hotel pool may be an incidental activity.

(School Name) is arranging a trip where students may go swimming. This signed form is required for all students who wish to participate in this recreation program.

(Explain the nature of the aquatic activity) Your child will be supervised. (See page 5 for details).

Inherent Risk

Swimming is a sport with physical demands and inherent risks which are beyond the control of (name of venue), and (name of School Board). Swimmers and their parents/guardians must assume these risks.

Acknowledgement

I/we have read and understand these warnings. For the purpose of this outing, my child's swim classification is:
(Circle only one.)

Non-swimmer

Swimmer

While in or near the water, all K – 2 children, regardless of swimming ability, will be required to wear a Canadian approved life jacket or PFD that is in good working order and that fits properly. Parents or facility must provide the PFD or life jacket.

Non-Swimmer.

While in deep water, all non-swimmers will be required to wear a Canadian approved life jacket or PFD that is in good working order and that fits properly. Parents facility must provide the Canadian approved life jacket or PFD. Canadian approved life jacket or PFD's are recommended for all non-swimmers in shallow water. Parental and supervisor discretion may apply with regard to older students.

Swimmer.

A swim test will be administered at the swim venue. Only those who pass will be allowed in deep water. See page 9 for details about the endurance test.

For Grade 3 and older

I want my son/daughter to wear a PFD as supplied. Yes No

Dated: _____

Signature of student: _____

Signature of parent/guardian: _____

PERMISSION

I give permission for my son or daughter _____ to participate in the swimming activity to be held at (name of venue) on (date).

Dated: _____ Signature: _____

Please note: *The Manitoba Health Act* requires that no person infected with a communicable disease or having open sores on his or her body shall enter the water.

Swimmers Rules and Expectations

Each swim venue will have its own set of rules that are to be followed by all participants. There are elements of risk in swimming that common sense and personal awareness can help reduce this risk. Remember the following:

- Swim only in designated areas.
- Swim with the buddy system.
- Never dive in shallow water.
- Know your limits.
- No horseplay, pushing or shoving on the deck or in the water.
- To prevent choking, never chew gum or eat food in the water.
- For outdoor pools and lake swimming, stay out of the water if storms are forecast.
- When lake swimming, watch for dangerous waves and currents.
- Restrict activities to designated swimming areas, usually marked by buoys.
- Never swim in the dark.
- Never push others under the water.
- Pay attention to the supervisors.

Failure to comply with the above rules and expectations will lead to loss of privilege to participate in the activity.

Swimming Ability Test or “Swim to Survive” Test

In order to enter deep water, or as part of an orientation for activities that will occur around water for prolonged periods of time (canoe trips, sailing trips, camping trips near water, etc.), a swim test must be administered to all participants. The minimum performance level required is completion of the Canadian Swim to Survive Standard; perform a disorienting entry into deep water, tread water for one (1) minute, swim a fifty (50) metre distance non-stop using any stroke or combination of strokes. In the case where this standard differs from that required by the venue, the higher of the two shall apply.

Emergency Action Plan

YouthSafe Manitoba: Field Trip Safety for Schools contains helpful advice on preparing an emergency action plan and how to safely conduct a wide range of aquatic outings. In addition, *the Manitoba Physical Education Safety Guidelines* has developed safe instructional practices for class activities, in order to minimize the inherent element of risk. Please consult these resources or contact the risk manager at the Manitoba School Boards Association for further assistance when planning your aquatic activity.

We recommend that at least one staff person, other than the lifeguard, should have a current certification in Standard First Aid & Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Level C (CPR-C). IMMEDIATE TREATMENT WITH CPR MAY PREVENT DEATH OR MASSIVE BRAIN DAMAGE.



APPENDIX A: Approved Lifejacket vs. PFD

The term lifejacket increasingly is used as a generic term for any wearable floatation device designed to save life. In Canada, however, the term has specific legal connotations when found on the label of an approved device. When preparing for any aquatic activity with your students you need to be aware of the differences between true lifejackets and other approved Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs).

Approved – Any floatation device used as a safety item for a school activity needs to be an approved device. That is, it must have an intact label that sets out how it is to be worn, and that specifies the general age category the item is designed for. Models must also state the weight range the item will support, and many also include a maximum chest size (circumference) for wear. Most importantly, the label will state that the device is Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Transport (Canada), or Transport Canada approved.

- The age category listed on labels will generally be broad (infant, child, youth, adult), while the weight ranges will be more specific.
- Expect to see weight ranges in metric (Kg) rather than old imperial (pounds) measurements on newer models.
- Likewise, chest measurements are more likely to be in metric (cm) rather than old imperial (inches) measurements on newer models.
- Items that are US Coast Guard approved are not automatically approved for use in Canada. Only items with Canadian approval indicated on the label meet all Canadian regulatory requirements.
- Approval of a device is void if the label is missing/unreadable, or if the device has been repaired or altered from its original manufactured condition.

Lifejacket – A lifejacket is a type of floatation device that is designed to turn the wearer over onto their back so that their face remains clear of the water. On the label of an approved lifejacket in Canada you may see the device referred to as a “Standard Lifejacket”, a “Small Vessel Regulation Lifejacket”, or a “Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Lifejacket.” No matter the exact phrasing, all of the devices, when worn properly, are designed to flip an unconscious individual onto their back. Lifejackets are best used in cases where maximum floatation is required, where high visibility is necessary, and/or where a significant amount of time afloat might be expected prior to rescue.

- Can only be orange, red or yellow in colour for high visibility.
- Provide the highest amount of floatation support of any floatation device.
- The type of device that would be found on a cruise ship, ferry, or other commercial passenger vessel at sea or on a large inland body of water. Used on these vessels for emergency evacuation purposes.
- Not designed for high energy/velocity aquatic sporting activity such as boogie boarding, tubing or water skiing.
- In Canada, inflatable lifejackets may only be worn by individuals 16-years old or older.

Personal Floatation Device– A PFD is a type of floatation device that is designed to allow more freedom of movement than a lifejacket. A PFD is less buoyant than a lifejacket, and therefore a wearer can float in any body position but will always end up lower in the water than if they were in a lifejacket. PFDs are best used in cases where floatation is required, but so is a greater range of movement such as many aquatic sporting activities. The design of most PFDs mean they are generally more comfortable than a lifejacket, and may provide more warmth to an individual when worn in the water.

- Come in many different colours and designs. Bright colours, like orange, red and yellow, are recommended for wear in open water conditions to enhance visibility.
- Different models exist for different aquatic sports (water skiing vests vs. paddling vests for example), and can be very specialized while still offering floatation support in an emergency.
- For individuals learning to swim they allow practice in many different body positions, while also providing some floatation support.
- Weak or unsure swimmers may panic even while wearing a PFD because, due to the overall lower floatation support of a PFD, they may find themselves floating very low in the water.
- In Canada, inflatable PFDs may only be worn by individuals 16-years old or older, and with specific restrictions on where they can be used.

Sound Signal– For all floatation devices (lifejacket and PFD) it is recommended that a sound signaling device of some sort be attached to the device. This sound signal needs to be able to make noise, even when wet, and be able to function in any water or weather conditions. The most common sound signal attached to lifejackets is a plastic and pea-less whistle.