

FAQs: Healthy and Safe Swimming at Public Aquatic Venues during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Model Aquatic Health Code Network Webinar
May 22, 2020, 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM EDT

The National Association of County and City Health Officials' (NACCHO's) Model Aquatic Health Code Network, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Council for the Model Aquatic Health Code, held a webinar to discuss the reopening of aquatic venues during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a summary of the questions answered during the webinar, for further information, please refer to the webinar recording, slides, and resources at the end of this document.

- [Webinar Recording](#)
- [Webinar Slides](#)

Please note that the information provided during this webinar are guidelines and recommendations. Decisions to reopen, cleaning schedules/protocols, and pool operation guidelines should follow local/state regulations and are up to the discretion of each aquatic venue. Refer to local and state agencies to ensure each venue-specific plan aligns with local regulations.

General

- Can the virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) be transmitted through water or aerosolized water?
There is currently no evidence of transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus through treated or untreated water, including aerosolized water. In aquatic venues, chlorination should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19 ([CDC: COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions, 2020](#)).

Pool Occupancy, Social Distancing, and Cloth Face Coverings

- Should pool occupancy be limited to maintain social distancing?
While there is no formula to determine the number of swimmers permitted, aquatic facilities should determine how many people can be on the pool deck while maintaining social distancing. This will provide for a safe environment if the pool needs to be evacuated, such as during an emergency rescue or a fecal incident.
- Can cloth face coverings be used as a substitute for social distancing?
Cloth face coverings should be worn in public settings where social distancing is hard to maintain, such as in locker rooms, bathrooms, and other confined spaces. Cloth face coverings should NOT be worn while in the water, and they should not be worn by children under age 2 or by anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or unable to remove the covering without assistance ([CDC: About Cloth Face Coverings, 2020](#)).



- What strategies can be taken to keep social distancing while in pools, where cloth face coverings cannot be worn?
Physical cues or guides, such as lane lines in the water, chairs and tables on the deck, or tape on decks, floors, and sidewalks may provide a visual guide to swimmers. Signage around the facility is a good reminder to patrons to maintain social distancing, even while in the water.
- What are the guidelines for lap swimming?
To maintain social distancing, it is recommended to limit one swimmer per lane. For more advanced swim teams, staggered swimming sets, starting swimmers at opposite ends, or station training may be modifications to training plans to keep swimmers safe ([USA Swimming: Facility Re-Opening Messaging and Planning, 2020](#)).
- What about aquatic settings where it may be difficult to maintain social distancing (i.e., small venues, lazy rivers, wave pools)?
Facilities or areas that cannot support social distancing should remain closed or limited to one family at a time. The CDC strongly recommends coming up with a facility-specific plan that considers the ability of each venue to maintain social distancing, cleaning, and disinfecting ([CDC: Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19](#)).

Cleaning Surfaces, Pools, and Equipment

- How should pool equipment, such as pool noodles or kickboards, be cleaned?
Shared objects should undergo cleaning and disinfecting each time they are used. Cleaning equipment with soap and water prior to disinfection removes debris that could limit the efficacy of disinfectants. Use List N EPA-registered disinfectants and follow manufacturer's instructions for application methods and contact time. If List N disinfectants are not available, household bleach can be diluted and used (1/3 cup of bleach into one gallon of water). Discourage patrons from sharing items that encounter the face, such as goggles and snorkels ([EPA: List N-Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2, 2020](#)).
- How often do surfaces (i.e., railings, doorknobs) need to be sanitized?
Individual facilities should identify surfaces that are most frequently touched (i.e., light switches, doorknobs) and develop an individual plan for cleaning and disinfecting. These surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected daily. Surfaces that should be cleaned, but do not need to be disinfected, include walls, floors, sidewalks, surfaces not frequently touched, and areas that have not been used in the last seven days ([CDC: Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19](#)).
- Will ultraviolet (UV) light disinfect air and surfaces in the aquatic facility? What are the recommended surface disinfectants?
There is currently no guidance on the use of UV light (or sunlight) for disinfecting the air and surfaces of SARS-CoV-2. Many variables, such as cloudiness, exposure time, and latitude must be taken into consideration. While there are groups investigating the effectiveness of UV light as a disinfectant, the list of surface disinfectants provided by the EPA is recommended ([EPA: List N-Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2, 2020](#)).
- Do fecal incidents need to be handled differently, or with extra precautions?
Based on current information, fecal incident response does not need to be handled differently and should continue to follow fecal incidence and outbreak response guidelines ([CDC: Fecal Incident and Outbreak Response, 2016](#)).

Lifeguard Training and Protective Measures

- How can lifeguards undergo certification and training following social distancing guidelines? Guidelines may vary depending on the training agency, but many have released interim guidance on lifeguard training. Blended learning may be utilized for cognitive information, and skill sessions may be able to be practiced while maintaining social distancing ([American Red Cross: COVID-19 Prevention & Safety Information for Students, 2020](#)).
- What personal protective equipment should lifeguards utilize while on duty? When social distancing cannot be maintained, lifeguards should utilize a cloth face covering when not in the water. A bag-valve-mask or a positive pressure ventilator with a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter should be used when providing medical aid. Check the directives of employing and training agencies, which should be consistent with those of state and local public health authorities ([United States Lifesaving Association: Lifeguarding and COVID-19, 2020](#)).
- What precautions are recommended for lifeguards performing emergency rescues? The CDC as well as the American Heart Association (AHA) recommend the use of a HEPA filter when performing resuscitation. Refer to individual lifeguard training agencies for recommendations for safely rescuing a distressed or drowning swimmer ([American Heart Association, Resources for CPR Training and Resuscitation, 2020](#)).
- Is it the responsibility of the lifeguard to enforce social distancing guidelines? Lifeguards who are actively lifeguarding are not expected to monitor handwashing, use of cloth face coverings, or social distancing. Assign this monitoring responsibility to another staff member ([CDC: Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19](#)).
- What is the difference between face shield and face coverings? Face shields refer to a plastic sheet serving as a barrier around one's face for impact and splash prevention, commonly worn by surgeons and medical professionals. Cloth face coverings are recommended for use by the public to provide a layer preventing the respiratory droplets from traveling in the air and onto other people. While cloth face coverings are recommended for use by the public, it is up to the individual to determine what is most comfortable. Lifeguards should refer to their employing and training agencies for specific guidelines ([Webinar recording time 1:19:20](#)).

Other Water Features

- Are there specific guidelines for circulating and non-circulating splash pads during COVID-19? Circulating and non-circulating splash pads should be treated the same as pools during COVID-19, as there is currently no evidence that the virus can be spread through water. Crowding should be limited to maintain social distancing of patrons, and operators are strongly encouraged to use broadcasting, signage, and markers to ensure people are staying six feet apart from those they do not live with ([Webinar recording time 00:59:00](#)).
- In indoor pool settings where air flow is more restricted and there is a higher droplet formation, should extra precautions be taken? Ensure that ventilation systems of indoor spaces are operating properly and increase introduction and circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so



poses a safety risk to staff, patrons, or swimmers ([CDC: Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19](#)).

- Should saltwater pools be managed differently than chlorinated pools in respect to COVID-19?

There is no difference in the management of saltwater pools regarding COVID-19. When salt is added to the pool, a generator converts it to chlorine, the same as in a chlorinated pool. There may be a concern if the self-generating electrode cells do not generate enough electricity to reach the recommended levels of chlorine ([Webinar recording time 1:14:00](#)).

- How can disinfection occur at natural pools and springs without damaging the environment? While there are currently no guidelines for these naturally occurring aquatic venues, there is no evidence of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 through water, either treated or untreated. Additional treatment is not recommended at this time. Operators at these sites should enforce social distancing and face masks when appropriate ([Webinar recording time 00:57:20](#)).

Liability, Communication, and Education

- How can operators promote aquatic facilities as a safe place during COVID-19? Posting signage about how to stop the spread of COVID-19, proper handwashing, and proper use of a cloth face covering can inform patrons of safety measures. Facilities may also wish to broadcast regular announcements on a PA system and utilize social media accounts to inform the public. Communication materials are provided on the CDC's website ([CDC: Print Resources, 2020](#); [CDC: Public Service Announcements, 2020](#)).
- What can a facility do regarding concerns about liability? Refer to a risk manager, insurance provider, or legal counsel for the best advice concerning liability around COVID-19. Ensure compliance with local and state regulations around COVID-19, use NACCHO's "Local Health Department COVID-19 Directory" to find the best point of contact for COVID-19 inquiries ([NACCHO: Local Health Department COVID-19 Directory, 2020](#)).

General COVID-19 Information

[Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19](#) (CDC)

[Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#) (CDC)

[Local Health Department COVID-19 Directory](#) (NACCHO)

[About Cloth Face Coverings](#) (CDC)

[Frequently Asked Questions \(COVID-19 and Water\)](#) (CDC)

[Facility Re-Opening Messaging and Planning](#) (USA Swimming)

Cleaning & Disinfection Resources

[List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#) (The Environmental Protection Agency)

[Cleaning and Disinfection](#) (CDC)

[Ultraviolet Radiation](#) (World Health Organization)

Information for Lifeguards

[Prevention & Safety Information for Students](#) (American Red Cross)

[Resources for CPR-Training](#) (AHA)

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

[Lifeguarding and COVID-19](#) (The United States Lifesaving Association)



Communication Resources

[COVID-19 Print Resources](#) (CDC)

[COVID-19 Public Service Announcements](#) (CDC)

Contact Information

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[Link to Website](#)