



## Strategies for Effective Management of Group Swimming

Recreational or group swimming times can be very hectic at aquatic facilities. These times tend to be well attended, noisy, active and primarily populated with youth. Lifeguards must be vigilant, scanning the pool and enforcing the rules to ensure that nobody gets hurt.

### **Supervision:**

A suggested standard ratio for lifeguards to swimmers is 1:25; this number is dependent on local codes and the type of user group. If the group is made up of challenged children or adults, there should be clear policies and agreements defining aid to participant ratios, for various disabilities, in addition to the 1:25 lifeguard ratio. Lifeguards should be trained in working with Special Populations. If the group is comprised of preschool youth with no additional supervision provided (teachers, etc), the lifeguard to swimmer ratio should be increased, eg. 1:15. Lifeguards should have the authority to: enforce all pool rules, limit the number of swimmers at any given time; exclude or remove unruly participants and close the pool if they feel that conditions are unsafe. At no time should the pool be open without certified lifeguards on deck. If a lifeguard is guarding alone, they should be a minimum of 18 years old. Additional staff and supervisors can assist guard by managing behavior on the deck, bleachers and for swimmer bathroom breaks. Other staff or parents can assist in the water.

### **Testing:**

It is recommended that during all recreational swim times, swimmers be deep water tested and non-swimmers restricted to water no deeper than their chest. Remember that "deep water" is a relative description. Four feet of water is *deep* to a child that is only 3 ½' tall. The pool should be separated into deep and shallow area by the use of a secure buoy line. In most states this line is required at the location where the water is five feet deep and/or at the drop-off point. It may be necessary to locate an additional line in more shallow water for younger or shorter swimmers.

The following tests can be used to effectively review a swimmer's ability:

#### **Shallow Water** (less than chest height)

Swim across the shallow end of the pool, without touching the pool bottom and using any stroke. A lifeguard with no other duties can conduct the test; another guard may be stationed in the water. Check if swimmer can regain a vertical position after lying face down in water.

#### **Deep Water** (over head)

If the swimmer can show the ability to accomplish the shallow end swim, move them to the deep end and have them jump into water and return to the surface. They should then swim one pool length unassisted and without rest; start swimmers at the deep end and travel to the shallow end. A lifeguard with no other duties can conduct the test with a reaching pole in hand. Then have them tread water for one minute, turn on their back, float briefly, then swim (either on front or back) to the side and exit the pool.



## **Swim Levels**

Swimmers that complete both the shallow and deep end tests have unrestricted access to pool. Swimmers that can only complete the shallow end test may only swim in water no deeper than their chest. Swimmers not able to complete either test must be restricted to water no deeper than their chest and wear a PFD and be accompanied by an adult within arms reach (no more than two swimmers per adult). Every swimmer should wear a color-coded wrist or neck (breakaway) band to designate their ability.

Testing should be completed at the beginning of the swim period. Latecomers wishing to be tested should be restricted to shallow water and tested at a future time that does not distract the lifeguard from their primary responsibility. All testing should be recorded for later use. Swimmers can be given their color-coded bands when signing into the facility if testing record is maintained at front desk.

## **Activities:**

When diving is allowed, the diving area should be separated from the swimming area by a secure buoy line. An additional lifeguard should be assigned to manage the diving area. This system should also be followed for any other activity areas such as swings or slides.

## **Buddy System:**

All camps and childcare programs should utilize the Buddy System for recreational swimming. This system pairs (or triads) all swimmers with another swimmer (Buddy) of similar ability. Each Buddy is responsible for the other; if their Buddy is having a problem, they can help to alert the aquatic staff. Buddies should remain in the same area and be instructed to not try and rescue anyone in the case of emergency. If a buddy needs to leave the water (ex. bathroom) for any reason their Buddy must also leave until both are ready to return. All swimmers should clear the pool and "Buddy Up" when notified by whistle code for a "Buddy Check". Swimmers should join and raise hands with their Buddy while sitting at the water's edge. A staff member should be assigned to scan the pool bottom and another to perform a Buddy Count. After the pool is clear and all Buddies are accounted for, the swimmers may re-enter the water and resume activities. This system should be tested regularly during each swim time to ensure that Buddies are near each other, being responsible, and that a check can be performed quickly and efficiently. Using this system does not exclude these swimmers from being tested prior to being allowed in the deep water. Tracking of Buddies should be accomplished by the use of a Buddy Board / Tag Board or a Buddy List on a clipboard.