



Considerations for the Use of Mask, Fins and Snorkel

.Aquatic facilities should include use guidelines for mask, fin and snorkel in their general operating procedures. Any guidelines should be consistently enforced by lifeguards and other staff. The use of mask, fins and snorkel is not recommended for general recreational swim periods. Mask, fins and snorkel usage should be restricted to appropriately supervised Skin Diving or Scuba Diving programs which may include specifically identified recreational swims. Restricting use of this equipment may help to reduce common injuries, incidents and patron complaints or misuse. The items below should be considered when developing use guidelines for an aquatic facility:

- Users should be trained in skin diving to fully appreciate the sport and understand the risks to themselves and others. Risks include lack of breath control required to use the equipment, Shallow Water Blackout, cramping and inadvertent interference with, and possible injury to other swimmers.
- Some swimmers request to use a mask (covering nose) to reduce eye irritation from chlorine. Swim goggles should suffice for swimmers who do not tolerate chlorinated water in their eyes.
- Inexperienced users can panic with a flooded mask inhaling water thru their nose. Other inexperienced users can choke on residual water in their snorkel resulting in rescue or assistance from a lifeguard.
- Severe cramping has been associated with the use of fins. This is especially true for the occasional traveler to the Islands who want to practice with fins in the pool before skin or scuba diving on the reefs.
- Incidents of [Shallow Water Blackout](#) have been associated with the use of this equipment as users hold their breath while swimming underwater. Once swimmers are underwater they are often invisible to life guards due to glare and agitation, and if Shallow Water Blackout occurs the problem begins and ends underwater with drowning. Breath Holding Activities should be disallowed except in the case of highly supervised activities such as scuba diving, skin diving and synchronized swimming.
- Common injuries include other swimmers being kicked in the face with fins or poked with a snorkel as an inexperienced skin diver ascends from the bottom.
- Mask, fins and snorkel users often collide with other swimmers as they are moving faster through the water due to fins and are looking everywhere but ahead.
- Snorkels should not be modified by adding length to the tube or adding a ping-pong ball check valve at the top of the snorkel. Both these modifications can result in reduced safety for the user.

Evaluating Competent Use of Equipment

The ability to swim a length of the pool with a mask, fins and snorkel is not an accurate indication of competency. This may seem counterintuitive however, the physical skill of breath control required for safe and effective use of a mask and snorkel while swimming a length of the pool with a snorkel only (breathing normally, not holding their breath) is a better indication of required breath control. Users who do not have the required breath control will breathe water in through their nose and choke. The physical skill to clear a flooded mask while underwater and subsequently clear a flooded snorkel at the surface with the remaining air is also an indication of required breath control. Users who do not have the required breath control may choke on the remaining water in the snorkel. These methods may be used for evaluating a swimmer's competency with the equipment.

Conclusion

Providing opportunities for swimmers to use/practice with mask, fins and snorkel requires lifeguard training and proper management. Lifeguards should be trained in, and understand the potential risks to users and others. Lifeguards should be trained in the unique guarding and rescue challenges associated with this equipment. Pool rules should reflect the mask, fins and snorkel policy of the organization. Some facilities allow the use of mask, fins and snorkel at specific, scheduled, low usage times, guarded by an appropriately trained and experienced lifeguard.