



Considerations for Developing Youth Swim Testing Protocols

All aquatic facilities that offer youth swim programs or times should develop protocols for establishing swimmer abilities. Protocols should be adopted that establish consistent use guidelines, testing procedures and use restrictions. The following information and associated sample swim testing document should be used to develop site-specific protocols. While this information is designed for aquatic facilities with pools it can easily be adapted to lakefront or open water locations.

The following recommendations have been created to assist the aquatic safety team in developing an organization swim testing policy that can be implemented consistently at all locations.

Swim Testing Policy Components:

1. Facility use age requirements
2. Testing procedure
3. Pool use restrictions
4. Swimmer identification
5. Pool safety arrangements
6. Lifeguard responsibility
7. Swimmer ability tracking

Facility use age requirements –age restrictions for youth accessing facilities without adult supervision; including pool use should be considered (if allowed). The following examples should be discussed with standards then adopted for all locations:

- Youth must be at least 10 years of age to access the facility without an adult
- Youth under 10 years of age must have a responsible adult with them in the pool area
- Youth under 7 years of age must have a responsible adult with them in the water when using the pool (within arm's reach)
- All youth non-swimmers (as determined by testing) must have a responsible adult with them in the water when using the pool (within arm's reach)
- Youth guests (of any age) must be accompanied by a member (of any age) at all times

Swim Testing procedure – the following testing procedure is recommended by the YMCA of the USA. YMCA procedures should (at a minimum) meet these guidelines; other organizations should comply with national recommendations that pertain to them:

1. A deep water competency test consists of the following:
 - a. Swim across the shallow end of pool. If successful, move to the deep end.
 - b. Jump into water that is over the patron's head and return to the surface.
 - c. Swim one pool length (25 yards) unassisted and without rest. Swimmer must maintain positive body position (legs should not drop past 45 degree angle) for the entire distance. Start swimmers at the deep end and travel to the shallow end (if they tire they may be able to stand).
 - d. 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.
2. A shallow water competency (if cannot complete deep test) test consists of the following:
 - a. Swimmer is placed in a horizontal position on their back by the testing guard.
 - b. Swimmer must then stand up (regain a vertical position).
 - c. Swimmer is then placed in a horizontal position on their front by the testing guard.
 - d. Swimmer must again stand up (regain a vertical position).
3. If a patron cannot regain a vertical position from either a back or front floating position they are considered a non-swimmer.

Pool use restrictions – use restrictions should be developed and enforced for all youth after testing has been completed. The following restrictions are provided for example in developing local protocols:

1. Deep water competent swimmers may access all parts of the pool.
2. Shallow water competent swimmers must stay in water that is arm pit deep or less.
3. Swimmers who do not pass the shallow water competency test are considered non-swimmers.
4. Swimmers who decline to take the test are also considered non-swimmers.
5. Non-swimmers must stay in water that is arm pit deep or less and require active adult supervision.
6. Active supervision means the adult must be in the water within arm's reach at all times (1 adult per 2 children ratio).
7. Non-swimmers who do not meet the "arm pit depth" guideline are required to wear a Coast Guard approved PFD and require active adult supervision.

Swimmer identification – all swimmers should be banded or wear some form of identification (necklaces, caps, wrist band etc.) based on their swim ability. The following recommendations are encouraged as minimum guidelines; local organizations may choose to exceed them. Many aquatic facilities classify swimmers as only “swimmer” (deep-water) or “non-swimmer”, in which case the arm-pit depth guideline must also be enforced for all swimmers that are not deep-water competent.

1. Green band – deep-water competent
2. Yellow band – shallow-water competent
3. Red band – non-swimmers; those that meet arm-pit depth guideline and those required to wear PFD

Pool safety arrangements – Pools zones should be organized for all swim times; these include all group uses, recreation and family swims. The following recommendations are encouraged as minimum guidelines; local organizations may choose to exceed them.

1. Pools should be sectioned off with the use of buoy-lines to create deep-water, shallow-water and non-swimmer zones
2. Diving and slide areas should be sectioned-off with buoy lines to control access by deep-water competent swimmers; one at a time

Lifeguard responsibilities – The following recommendations are encouraged as minimum guidelines; local organizations may choose to exceed them. In addition to their normal responsibilities as a Lifeguard and aquatic safety leader, Lifeguards should also follow these guidelines:

1. Swim testing may only be conducted when other swimmers are not in the pool or when additional Lifeguard supervision is present in sufficient ratio to allow for a Lifeguard to conduct testing
2. Lifeguards must ensure that all swimmers have been tested while on duty (or considered non-swimmers)
3. Lifeguards must close any diving and/or slide (other attractions) areas when ratios are exceeded and/or other Guards are not available to supervise these areas while maintaining Guard to swimmer ratios
4. Lifeguards must ensure that adult supervision (deck and/or in-water) is provided as outlined in the organization’s procedures

Swimmer ability tracking – a system for tracking swim ability testing results must be maintained and available to all Lifeguards while on duty. The following are examples of systems currently in use by various aquatic facilities. Each organization should select one method to implement at all locations.

1. Notebook is maintained on pool deck with swimmer's name, test date, Guard initials and ability level; swimmers are given a band by Guard staff (off-duty)
2. Notebook is maintained at service desk with swimmer's name, test date, Guard initials and ability level; swimmers are given a band when they check in

Additional Considerations:

1. Each patron tested will be given a colored safety band (or other ID) to wear at the pool.
2. At no time may youth that are not deep-water competent swim in the deep end of the pool.
3. Swim lessons should be arranged (when possible) for swimmers that are not deep-water competent.
4. Intentionally wearing the wrong color safety ID results in immediate removal from the pool.
5. Posting swim test times helps manage the safety swim test system and educates parents about the safety swim test.
6. Remember shallow water is in relationship to the swimmer; use a guideline of water that is armpit deep or less. For small children, the shallow end of your pool still may be deep water to them.
7. Depth is determined as the maximum depth in the zone. If the section of the pool (zone) has a depth from 3 – 5 feet, but there is not line to restrict access to the 5 foot depth, then that zone is considered to be 5 feet deep and swimmers must meet the arm-pit depth guideline.
8. Final competency includes having the swimmer or parents read all pool rules.
9. Pools with a drop-off at 5 ft should have an additional buoy line at 4 ft to help the Lifeguard manage and control the various height swimmers.
10. Zero-depth-entry pools should have a buoy line at the 2.5 ft to 3 ft depth to help the Lifeguard and parents manage non-swimmers.
11. All swimmers must wear a PFD when participating in activities outside standard swimming zones at waterfront locations; including watercraft, slides and inflatables.
12. Non-swimmers should be restricted from watercraft use or at least only accompanied by a trained deep-water competent adult.
13. PFDs should be supplied by organization and meet US Coast Guard approval. Type II will keep wearer's head out of water in most cases, Type III will not.

Additional aquatic safety information is available in the [Safe-Wise Online Resource Library](#)

Swim Testing Procedures for Youth

Swim Testing Policy Components:

1. Facility use age requirements
2. Testing procedure
3. Pool use restrictions
4. Swimmer identification
5. Pool safety arrangements
6. Lifeguard responsibility
7. Swimmer ability tracking

1. Facility use age requirements:

- Youth must be at least 12 years of age to access the facility without an adult
- Youth less than 12 years of age must have a responsible adult with them in the pool area at all times except during leader led programs.
- Youth non-swimmers as determined by the swim test, must have a responsible adult with them in the water (within arm's reach).
- Any child under seven years of age must have an adult (at least 18 years of age) accompany them in the water (within arm's reach).
- All youth guests must be accompanied by a member when accessing the facility and must follow the age/supervision requirements as listed above.

2. Swim testing procedure:

- Swim across the shallow end of pool. This will determine; "non-swimmer", "shallow water competency" and ability to continue to the deep water competency test.
- Deep Water Competency Test: Swim comfortably 25 yards from deep to shallow without touching the bottom or sides of the pool. Jump into water that is over the patron's head and return to the surface. Tread water for one minute; turn on their back, float briefly, exit water.

3. Pool use restrictions:

- Deep water competent swimmers may access all parts of the pool.
- Patrons who do not pass the swim test are considered non-swimmers.
- Patrons who decline to take the swim test are considered non-swimmers.
- Non-swimmers must stay in shallow water (armpit-depth or less) and require active adult supervision.
- Active adult supervision means an adult must be in the water within arm's reach at all times (1 adult per 2 children ratio).
- Non-swimmers who do not meet the "armpit-depth" guideline are required to wear a US Coast Guard approved Type II or III PFD and require active adult supervision.

4. Swimmer identification:

- All swimmers must be clearly identified as to their swimming ability.
- Swimmers are classified only as "swimmer" or "non-swimmer".
- Swimmer – green band
- Non-swimmer – no band

5. Pool safety arrangements:

- Pools zones should be organized for all swim times; including outside group use, birthday parties, recreation and family swims.
- Buoy-lines will be used to create deep-water and shallow-water zones.
- Diving and slide areas should be sectioned off with buoy lines in order to control access by only deep-water proficient swimmers; one at a time.

6. Lifeguard responsibilities:

- Swim testing should follow the POSTED schedule. Schedule should also be in the brochure
- Swim testing in addition to posted schedule may only be conducted when other swimmers are not in the pool or when additional Lifeguard supervision is present in sufficient ratio to allow for a Lifeguard to conduct testing.
- Lifeguards must ensure that all swimmers have been tested. Patrons who arrive and have not been tested are considered non-swimmers and must remain in arm-pit depth water until such time testing can be arranged.
- Lifeguards must ensure that adult supervision is provided as outlined in the procedures. Unsupervised non-swimmers will be removed from the water at the Lifeguard's discretion.

7. Swimmer ability tracking:

- A notebook will be maintained at the member service desk with swimmer's name, test date, Guard initials and ability level.
- Swimmers are given their GREEN band by the member service staff at check in.
- It is recommended that "deep water competency" be noted on a patron's access screen as they scan in and the green band be given at that time.
- Lifeguards will give patrons who have just successfully completed the "deep water competency test" their green band. They will get their GREEN band at check-in thereafter.

Additional recommendations:

- All swimmers will be given a colored identification band to wear in the pool. Non-swimmers and those not tested will have no band.
- Non-swimmers may not swim in the deep end of the pool unless during instruction.
- Swim lessons should be arranged (when possible) for swimmers that are not deep-water proficient.
- Posting swim test times helps in managing the safety swim test system and in educating parents about the safety swim test.
- Remember shallow water is in relationship to the swimmer; use a guideline of water that is armpit-depth or less. For small children, the shallow end of your pool still may be deep water to them. Water depth in shallow end varies.
- Depth is determined as the maximum depth in the zone. If the section of the pool (zone) has a depth from 3 – 5 feet, but there is not a line to restrict access to the 3 foot depth, then that zone is considered to be 5 feet deep and swimmers must meet the armpit-depth guideline.
- Final competency includes having the swimmer and parents read all pool rules
- Non-Swimmers who are not adequately supervised by a responsible adult will be immediately removed from the water at the Lifeguard's discretion for the safety of the non-swimmer.
- Instructional Flotation Devices (IFDs -such as noodles and bubbles) are for instructional use only and should not be used in lieu of a PFD.