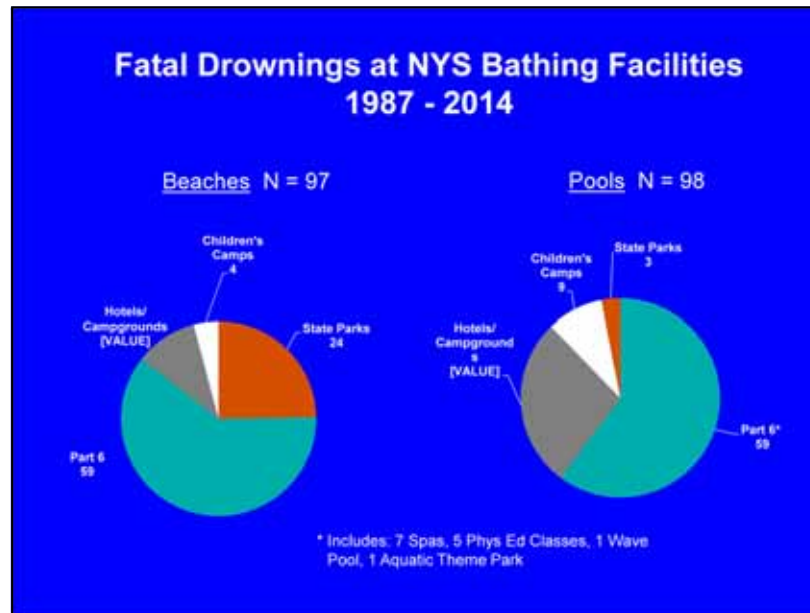


**Children's Camps  
Buddy/Board Systems**

## **Agenda**

- **Drowning Incidents**
- **Buddy/Board System Components**
  - Swimming assessments
  - Swimming areas
  - Buddy system
  - Board system or equivalent accountability system
- **Public Health Hazards**
- **Role Play**
- **Safety Plan**

Presentation provides a broad overview of the buddy/board system and challenges to implement it on-site and during camp trips.



**Part 6.** Aquatic Amusement Parks, Municipal, Apartment Complex, Health Clubs, YMCA, School, Spa, Mobile Home Park, and Homeowner Association Pools.

**State.** Operated by NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and Department of Environmental Conservation.

**Children's Camp.** Day and Overnight.

**Temporary Residence.** Hotel, Motel, Campground, Bungalow Colony.

## Incident #1

- **Day Camp Drowning:**
  - 8 year old male (non-swimmer)
  - Approximately 30 campers in the pool
  - Discovered by a camper in 5 to 6 feet of water
  - Numerous buddy/board system deficiencies
    - Not restricted to water less than chest deep
    - Not assigned a buddy
    - Not visually identified
  - Poor lifeguard and counselor positioning

- During a recreation swim period.
- Camper alerted that victim was on the bottom of the pool - lifeguards removed the victim and performed CPR.
- Victim not restricted to water less than chest deep - a camper reported that victim had been in the deep end pulling on her.
- Safety plan not followed.
  - Buddy list had 16 campers listed, however only 13 were present on the day of the incident -list not updated
  - Buddy list did not reflect buddy pairs or swimming abilities
- Counselors were responsible to implement the buddy/board system but had inadequate training - not aware that the buddy system was mandatory thought it was a suggestion.
- Two lifeguards and three counselors were on duty.
  - One lifeguard was standing next to the diving board observing campers using the board
  - One lifeguards was standing with a counselor at the shallow end of the pool.
  - Two counselors were standing together at the deep end of the pool.

## **Incident # 2**

- **17 year old male camper (non-swimmer)**
- **Found in 7 feet of water after touched by a camper. Pool bottom not visible**
- **No buddies assigned by camp**
- **No accountability system**

- The aquatics director reported that the pool water was cloudy at the beginning of the swimming program and became progressively worse as the swimming session went on. In an attempt to compensate for the clarity more frequent buddy checks were conducted. At the end of the swimming period, a camper asked for permission to retrieve a can of soda, which fell into the deep end of the pool. Camper reported brushing up against something under water.
- Two of the three required sand filters had been disconnected and the pool water was below the skimmer level.
- The Pool should not have been used because of poor water clarity, and inadequate filtration and skimming.
- Campers were allowed to choose their own buddies. Camp staff did not ensure that each camper had a buddy.
- Reportedly there were buddy checks but not at scheduled intervals. Buddy checks consisted of swimmers pairing together and staff checking to make sure everyone had a buddy. The checks did not identify the victim as missing. No accounting system was used.
- Camper entry into and exit from the swim area was not recorded

## **Incident # 2 (cont.)**

- **Non-swimmers were not restricted to water less than chest deep and not visually identified**
- **Safety plan procedures were not implemented**
- **Counselors not actively supervising campers**

- The waterfront was not operated in accordance with the camp's written safety plan. Camp aquatics director was not familiar with the safety plan - had not read it for two or three years. The camp's safety plan described a buddy/board system which included issuance and use of buddy tags, use of buddy board and a schedule for buddy checks that referenced buddy pairs with the buddy board. The plan also describes a "pre-swim inspection" in which the staff member must approve the clarity of the pool water. None of these provisions were implemented.
- Counselors at the swimming pool had no established camper supervisory responsibilities.
- Two of the five aquatic staff on duty were less than 17 years old.

## Incident #3

- Incident occurred at the camp's waterfront (lake) during an open swim activity
- 9 year old male camper (non-swimmer)
- Victim found in 6 feet of water
- Buddy/Board System - modified from approved safety plan
  - Campers were required to exit the water and to be accounted for by counselors
  - Buddies did not stay together
  - Triples not limited to one per area

- overnight children's camp with a capacity of approximately 180 campers
- The Camp's written safety plan was not implemented (described below).
- The day of the incident was the first day of the camp session and the victim had just been swim tested. After swim tests staff decided to let campers go for a swim. Buddy tags were not yet available and swimming occurred without the use of the buddy board. Campers were paired with a buddy, but campers entry or exit of swimming areas was not monitored.
- Buddies were assigned within their cabins, so more than one threesome existed in each area.
- Buddy checks were conducted by all campers exiting the water and meeting with designated counselors at prescribed areas. The Aquatic Director would then ask counselors individually if all campers were present. Buddies did not watch out for each other.
- Staff accounting for campers did not reinforce the buddy concept.
- A buddy check was called and the victim was not present.
- Victim's buddy was his brother, who was also a non-swimmer. He remained in the non-swimming area and did not know where his brother was. Several witnesses recall seeing the victim standing on a raft in deep water prior to the submersion.
- Lost bather procedures were initiated and the victim was found submerged in 6-feet of water approximately 10 minutes after the buddy check was called. Lifeguards performed CPR until EMS arrived.

### **Incident #3 (cont.)**

- **Non-swimmers not restricted to water less than chest deep**
- **Lifeguards - poor positioning, glare issues, no designated areas of supervision and improper age**
- **Counselors not actively supervising campers**

- This camp did not have adequate procedures to restrict non-swimmers to less than chest-deep water.
- All guards were located on a dock that extended perpendicular to the shore on the east side of the waterfront. The aquatics director explained that the guards were all positioned on one dock “because the swim was to be only 10-15 minutes long.”
- Two of three lifeguards on duty were less than 17 years old.
- Counselors were present on shore in the area directly in front of the swimming area, but did not supervise bathers in the water.
- Aquatics director and waterfront staff were not familiar with the details of the written plan.





View lifeguards had from docks located on the east side of the bathing facility, facing the water in a westerly direction resulted in a severe glare condition.

## Swimming Assessments

- **Assessment of swimming abilities for each camper (also recommended for staff)**
  - Determined by a progressive swim instructor (PSI)
  - Conducted annually and as appropriate
  - Campers considered non-swimmers until determined otherwise by PSI
- **Minimum of two bather classifications:**
  - Non-swimmer and swimmer

- See DOH Fact Sheet titled Progressive Swimming Instructor for NYS Children's Camps for approved PSI certifications
- Annual assessments are needed - camper's swimming abilities may change from year to year due to injuries and/or changes in fitness or physical abilities.
- Reassessment needed to advance to the next level.
- Assessment should be appropriate for the type of facility (i.e., pool, lake).

## Swimming Assessments

- **Assessment criteria is not specified in Subpart 7-2**
- **Suggested criteria included in the written safety plan template**
- **Two components**

No standard/code required assessment criteria. Based on their training, a PSI uses swimming criteria for instruction, which does not necessarily correspond to “Swimmer” and “Non-swimmer” categories.

Assessment criteria and categories must be specified in the safety plan and identify which level is equivalent to a non-swimmer.

## Swimming Assessments

### Component one (administered in water less than chest deep of the camper)

- Feet first entry into chest deep water
- Swim front crawl for 25 yards
- Swim elementary backstroke for 15 yards
- Shows the ability to follow the instructions

The ARC Camp Aquatic Training Module is no longer available. It was developed in 2001 in a collaborative effort between the American Red Cross (ARC), the NYSDOH and the camping industry. The training was offered to children's camp operators and aquatic staff to provide supplemental information, which was not contained in the ARC Lifeguarding or other aquatic courses. As part of the module, the above swimming assessment criteria was presented and may still be used.

- Start assessments in shallow water.

Other suggested criteria could be:

- Pool Swimming Ability Classification Test - *ARC WSI Level 4*
- Open Water Swimming Ability Classification Test - *Level 5* The reason for the increase in skill competency demonstration is that in lakes campers may need to swim greater distance than in a pool to reach a dock or other area to rest and water clarity issues may exist.

## **Swimming Assessments**

**Component two (administered in water greater than chest deep only after component one is successfully completed)**

- Maintain position on back 1 minute**
- Tread water for 1 minute**
- Swim breaststroke for 15 yards**
- Swim back crawl for 25 yards**

## Swimming Assessments

- **Non-swimmer restricted to water less than chest deep, except:**
  - during approved DOH learn-to-swim programs
  - when counselors are in the water directly supervising a maximum of three non-swimmers in shallow water in the non-swimmer area.

- See DOH Fact Sheet for approved learn-to-swim programs
- Other learn-to-swim programs may be used by camps, but non-swimmers must be restricted to water less than chest deep.
- Although the code allows non-swimmers in water beyond chest deep when counselors directly supervise a maximum of three non-swimmers ... it is not a recommended practice and should be avoided when possible because it relies on the attentiveness of a counselor.
- Swim cribs are recommended for non-surf beaches (because of “zero depth entry) and should be used for small children.

## Swimming Assessments (Cont.)

- Rationale for non-swimmer water depth restriction:
  - Bathers become buoyant in water chest deep and above, which causes them to lose contact with the bottom
  - Non-swimmers who lose contact with the bottom may not have the ability to prevent themselves from entering deeper water

**Non-swimmers in greater than chest deep water has been identified as a contributing factor in all non-swimmer drownings since 1988!**

## **Camp Trip Swimming Assessments**

- **Conducting swimming assessments when the camp does not have an onsite aquatics program or PSI staff:**
  - Use the facility's PSI (prior arrangement)
  - Borrow PSI from another camp
  - No assessment needed if campers will be restricted to water less than chest deep
- **Consideration should be given to reassessing campers when the on-site facility differs from off-site facility (i.e. pool vs. surf beach).**

The camp remains responsible for swimming assessments and must establish the criteria used to assess swimming abilities and ensure that the facility's PSI meets 7-2 requirements.

Skills for deep water swimming may differ based on the type of facility.



## Swimming Areas

- **Designate areas**
  - **Float lines**
  - **Staff positioning**
  - **Separate pools**
  - **Docks**

Some camps establish the non-swimmer area based on the height of the shortest non-swimmer.

Float lines may be repositioned to restrict the shortest camper to less than chest deep water.

Staff may be positioned in the water to restrict campers from entering greater than chest deep water. Must provide enough staff so campers do not enter other areas.

Separate pools can designate non-swimmers and swimmer areas.

## Swimming Areas

- **Designate areas (cont.)**
  - Non-swimmer less than chest deep
  - Natural bodies of water may have depth fluctuations
  - Surf beach and wave pool (not appropriate for non-swimmers)
  - At aquatic amusement parks, identify water depth for each attraction and prohibit use by non-swimmers accordingly
  - Some pools may be too deep for shortest non-swimmer

Camps must establish and train staff on procedures for restricting non-swimmers to water less than chest deep. We have too often seen safety plans that state “non-swimmers will be restricted to water less than chest deep” but the plan does not indicate how it will be accomplished. Bathers generally are not continuously vertical in the water which makes a visual system ineffective.

The water depth in natural bodies of water may fluctuate due to heavy rains, so camps may need to adjust area limits that are established by floats or docks.

### Camp trips and Municipal Pool/Beach

- Best to have an area separate from the assigned to the camp.
- Limit area of facility used by camp to an area that staff can effectively control - position staff in the water to restrict campers to one area of the pool/beach

## Visual Identification

- **Non-swimmers shall be conspicuously identified to be readily distinguishable from swimmers except where:**
  - non-swimmers are restricted from entering the swimmer area by a physical barrier such as a swim crib or dock (float lines are not physical barriers), or
  - are in a separate pool only for non-swimmers.

Visual identification of non-swimmers allows counselors and lifeguards to more easily identify campers who are not in the appropriate area.

## Visual Identification

- **Common identifiers-**
  - Wrist band, bathing caps, T-shirts
- **Identify the swimmers or both swimmers and non-swimmers**
- **Identification method may need to vary for camp trip swimming**
  - State Parks do not allow T-shirts to be worn in the water

Use different visual identifiers for non-swimmers and swimmers or identify swimmers only. If only non-swimmers are visually identified they can remove the identifier and enter the swimmer area unnoticed.

Public pool/beach - have all campers wear visual identifiers at public facilities so they can be easily distinguished from the public.

## Buddy System

- **Assign each bather to a buddy**
  - Pair campers with the same swimming ability
  - If a non-swimmer is paired with a swimmer, both must remain in the non-swimmer area
- **One threesome is allowed per swim area**

### Rationale:

The “buddy system” provides each camper with a partner to summon help in case of an emergency. Provides each camper with a personal “lifeguard”.

“Threesomes” dilute the concept of the “buddy system”.

## **Buddy System (cont.)**

- **Buddies must be instructed to:**
  - Notify lifeguards/counselors when their partner is in distress or missing
  - Stay in close proximity to their buddy

May need to allow for some separation during instructional swim when campers are demonstrating swimming strokes.

## **Buddy System**

### **Aquatic amusement park water slide**

- Counselor positioned at beginning and end (exit pool) of slide
- Campers stay in pairs in line; first camper down slide waits for buddy to exit ride and reports to counselor waiting at exit
- Counselor accounts for buddies as they exit ride
- Campers move as a group to the next attraction

Apply concept to other activities which only allow one individual on at a time.

Buddies must stay together in lazy rivers and similar rides.

## **Board System**

**(or equivalent accountability system)**

- **System for accounting for bathers**
- **Frequently either a stationary board or handheld “clip board”**
- **Board system identifies each bather by:**
  - full name
  - bather’s swimming ability
  - area the bather is assigned to
- **Must identify buddy pairs and triples**



## **Board System (cont.)**

- **A method of recording entry and exit from the pool/beach areas including:**
  - **Swimming areas**
  - **Pool/beach enclosure**
- **System must be in place to account for campers not intending to swim or needing to use the bathroom**
  - **Boy Scouts require campers that are not swimming to leave the bathing enclosure**

Areas with large pool/beach enclosures or no enclosures must specify how campers will be supervised and accounted for to ensure they do not enter the water without checking into the buddy/board system.

Swimmers may move between areas but must move with their buddy and notify the staff member maintaining the “board”.

## Example of a Buddy Board

- Color coding tags allow for a quick visual reference for staff to ensure campers are assigned to the appropriate area.
- A pre-established area for triples reminds staff that only one triple per area is allowed.
- Staff in the water should be incorporated into the buddy system and include on the buddy board.

Tags		Camp Fun – Buddy Board	
Cabin	Tag	Non-Swimmer Area	Swimmer Area
Cabin 1	●●	●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●
Cabin 2	●●	●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●
Cabin 3	●●●	●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●
Cabin 4	●●●	●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●
Beach		●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●
Restroom		●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●

Tag must have camper's full name and identify their swimming ability.

Sally Sample  
Non-swimmer

## Buddy/Board System

- Used during all swimming activities
  - Can be modified for instructional swimming activities
- Alternative system must be used for campers who are unable to comprehend or implement the buddy/board system
- Multiple pools in one enclosure

When campers cannot comprehend or implement the buddy/board system an alternative system should be used, such as counselors accounting for campers.

When there are multiple pools in one enclosure it may be necessary to use a separate buddy board for each pool depending on the number, size and distance between the pools. Campers must be checked in and out of each area within the pool and each pool.

## **Camp Trip Accountability Systems**

- **System does not need to account for the entire camp when groups will separate, such as at an aquatic theme park**
- **Types of accountability devices used**
  - Clipboard (use for small groups)
  - Pocket charts
  - Tongue Depressors (Wilderness swimming)
- **Campers and public swimming together**

Each group's counselor can account for the campers in their charge using a "clip board system".

Types of accountability device - examples provided in the next 3 slides.

Camper and public swimming together- Visually identify all campers from the public. Limit the area of the facility used by the camp. Station counselors in the water to delineate area.



In this example campers' full names and swimming ability (indicated with an I for intermediate or D for deep water) are placed on plastic inserts. The camp also marked the tabs with an M to identify campers with medical conditions. The camper's specific medical condition is listed on the back of the tab.

Plastic tabs can easily be removed and placed in appropriate sections.

The "board" folds in half for easy transport.

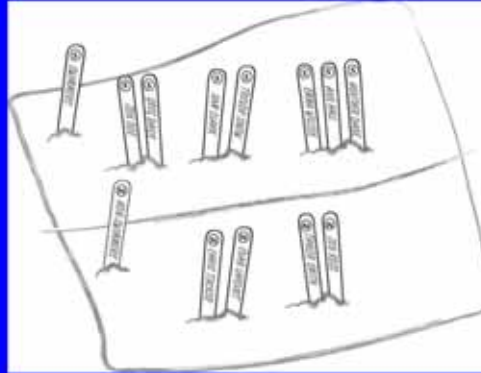


“Pocket chart” - Can be purchased from educational supply store/website. For the purposes of demonstrating this system we did not include individuals full name, only designated them as swimmers or non-swimmers. In the camp setting the camper’s full name and swimming ability must be indicated on the card.

The “pocket folder” can be hung on a fence or other nearby structure.

Rolls up for easy transport.

## Tongue Depressor System- Wilderness Swimming



Tongue depressor system description: Prior to the trip, each camper's full name and assessed swimming ability is written (with permanent marker) on a tongue depressor to be used in a similar way as a buddy tag. At the site, an area on the ground near the beach is selected to serve as the "buddy board" and non-swimmer and swimmer areas are scratched or scraped into the soil or outlined with sticks on the ground. Each camper's tongue depressor is stuck into the ground next to his/her buddy's and in the assigned swimming area. When buddy pairs change swimming areas or exit the water, their tongue depressors are relocated to the new area or removed from the ground.

Clothespins can be used in a similar fashion on a rope strung between two trees.

## Buddy Checks

- **Buddy checks of bathers must be conducted at least every 15 minutes.**
- **Checks must be referenced against the accounting system.**
- **Buddy checks, on average, should take no more than 60 seconds.**

- Staff should count the number of buddy pairs in each section and verify the count with the staff maintaining the board/accounting system. If the count does not match, count pairs again if the count still does not match initiate the lost swimmer plan.
- Buddy checks that take longer than 60 seconds to conduct may be an indication that the camp is not routinely implementing or not understanding the mechanics of the system.
- Subpart 7-2 does not mandate bathers exit the water to conduct buddy checks. Exiting the water may add to the time to implement.



## **Camp Trip - Buddy Checks**

- **Signal must not interfere with facility lifeguards**
  - **Flags**
  - **Hand signals**
  - **Facility may agree to signal buddy checks**

- Arrangements with the off-site facility prior to the trip must include agreement on the signal used to initiate buddy checks.
- When multiple camps are using the same off-site swimming facility it is a good idea to see if the facility can assist with signaling buddy checks.

## Public Health Hazards

- Subpart 7-2.1(b)(2)(xvi): failure to establish and enforce the Buddy System and Board System or other method generally accepted as providing a similar or equivalent level of bather safety during swim periods
- Subpart 7-2.1(b)(2)(xviii): failure to restrict non-swimmers to water less than chest deep except as allowed under Subdivision 7-2.11(a)

Non-swimmers in greater than chest deep water has been identified as a contributing factor in all non-swimmer drownings since 1988.

## **Public Health Hazards**

- **Subpart 7-2.1(b)(2)(xxvii) failure to implement the camp safety plan resulting in a child not being protected from any unreasonable risk to his or her safety**

## Written Safety Plan

- The camp safety plan is an operational and risk management manual.
- Risk management is the organized and planned effort of staff to prevent the loss of money, assets or human value due to events or circumstances that can be controlled.

DOH is concerned with the protection of the campers but other reasons are critical to the camp operators.

## Written Safety Plan

### Purpose:

- To provide for the safety of campers and staff
- System to identify, evaluate, reduce, prevent or control loss (injury, illness, death)
- Ensure consistent policies from year to year

The safety plan allows for consistency from year to year and for new staff to implement approved procedures.

## Swimming Safety Plan Overview

- Description of waterfront personnel
- Assessment of bather swimming abilities
- Water depth restrictions for bather swimming abilities
- Description of the visual identification on non-swimmers
- Bather facility capacity
- Description of Lifeguard positioning, ratios of Lifeguards to bathers, and designated supervision areas
- Other staff ratios & responsibilities
- Description of the minimum required safety & first aid equipment & proper positioning of equipment
- Description of communication signals
- Epileptic seizure policy
- Diving and deck slide safety
- Rules & Regulations
- Lost Bather Plan

- Supplemental checklists - draft form. Provides more space for comments and standardizes review.
- Safety Plan Review Frequency - must indicate annually one of the following:
  - Complete plan review
  - Partial plan review
  - Up to date affirmation
- Should review DOH 367 each year for any new activities.

## **Written Safety Plan**

### **Interactive templates for:**

- **Onsite swimming**
- **Camp trip swimming including aquatic amusement parks and wilderness swimming**

## **Safety Plan Requirements: Swimming Assessments**

**Specify how, when and by whom camper swimming ability will be assessed.**

- Identify swimmer classifications  
(i.e. swimmer, non-swimmer)**
- Provide criteria for each classification**
- Identify water depth restriction for each classification**



## **Safety Plan Requirements: Swimming Area**

- **Describe the method used to restrict non-swimmers to water less than chest deep.**
  - Counselors positioned in the water
  - Float lines
  - Separate pools (shallow water)
- **Specify how non-swimmers will be visually identified.**

## **Safety Plan Requirements: Buddy/Board System**

- **Describe the “board” system that will be used. Include:**
  - Overview of system use
  - Description of who will be included (bathers, others in enclosure on deck/beach, etc.)
  - “Buddy tag” details
- **Pairing of buddies (limit triples)**
- **Identify who will maintain the accounting system**

## **Safety Plan Requirements: Buddy Checks**

- **Specify “buddy check” procedures including:**
  - Frequency
  - Signal
  - Buddy checks referenced against accounting system
  - Instructions given to campers

Frequency - at least once every fifteen minutes

Signal - must be different from other communications used at the waterfront.

Instructions

- move together,
- grasp each other’s hands and raise them above their heads
- wait for signal to return to swimming

## **Additional Safety Plan Requirements for Camp Trip Swimming**

- **Specific plan for each trip location**
- **Describe aquatic amusement park attractions**
- **Describe parental permission statement**
- **Describe/include pre-arrangements and agreements with the facility**
- **Lifeguard and other staff duties and responsibilities**
- **Buddy/accounting systems**
- **Staff safety plan review 24 hrs prior to trip**

- Except for wilderness sites, only bathing facilities in NYS that have a valid permit to operate (issued from the LHD having jurisdiction) or bathing facilities operated by a NYS Agency may be used.
- Residential pool use is prohibited
- One generic plan for all trip locations is not adequate
- Include a copy of parental permission statement in safety plan (or a statement where the permission to swim is given. For example, permission(s) may be incorporated into the child's application to attend camp, etc.)
- Aquatic amusement park attractions - knowledge of facility and all attractions, which will be used. Identify water depths for each ride prior to trip, so non-swimmers can be restricted as appropriate.
- If facility provides lifeguard, camp's lifeguard role is to implement safety plan AND be an extra layer of aquatic supervision.

## **Safety Plan Requirements: Wilderness Swimming**

**Additional requirements for wilderness swimming:**

- Site assessment
- Safety rules
- Staff swimming assessments
- Safety equipment

Swimming assessments **MUST** be conducted prior to the trip.

See DOH wilderness swimming site assessment document.