

**SWIM  
IRELAND**

**Swim Ireland Open Water Swimming  
COVID-19 Return to Water Framework – Version 3  
(July 2020)**

**SWIM  
IRELAND**

**Me and  
the water**

## **Introduction**

Following the Government of Ireland's publication of the 'Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business' on Friday 1st May 2020 and the Northern Ireland Executive's publication of the 'Coronavirus Executive Approach to Decision-Making' on 12th May 2020, Swim Ireland produced a Roadmap as to how aquatic activities may be resumed on the island of Ireland on a phased basis. As Swim Ireland gain clarity on a number of issues within each Government's published guidelines, the recommendations and guidelines within this Roadmap have already begun to alter and will continue to be updated accordingly. Swim Ireland have been working with England, Scotland and Wales as part of a 'Four Nations Working Group' on these matters and have also observed and studied closely that which would currently be seen as best practice by other European nations.

This is Swim Ireland's third specific guidance document issued in relation to Open Water Swimming during this time.

## **Context**

Open Water swimming has a similar status to that of walking, hiking, running, and cycling, as a critical healthy activity within our communities. We have taken advice from Sport Ireland, and, in the south, 'outdoor swimming' is considered to be an outdoor pursuit that falls under the Government of Ireland's Roadmap definition for a return in Phase 1 due to commence on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

As with all exercise and activity at this time, Open Water swimming must comply with standards for social distancing and safety within our society. Open Water swimming does not require direct contact between athletes or coaches and social distancing can be maintained throughout swimming sessions.

At this stage, it is still advisable that unless you are an experienced open water swimmer, that you should not be entering open water (sea, lake and/or river). All swimmers must consider all of the risks to themselves and to safety personnel if anything were to go wrong. The risk of burdening the health/emergency services must be considered by them during what is a very challenging time. We need to minimise the risk to Search & Rescue (SAR) volunteer crews, helicopter crews and other front-line emergency services from being unintentionally exposed to COVID-19. In particular, we would caution at this juncture where there are no lifeguards on beaches – please check your local council website to see when and where lifeguards are working. Experienced Open Water swimmers are also to consider any governmental restrictions which are in place at that time.

We have some specific advice below relating to outdoor pools. This environment would be more suitable for less experienced open water swimmers compared to that of open water (sea, lake and/or river) swimming. We have included some of the advice from the Club Swimming Framework and encourage clubs who have access to an outdoor pool to read this in advance of any sessions commencing.

## **Fundamental Decisions Required Before Returning to Water**

1. **COMPLIANCE WITH CURRENT COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS** – Swim Ireland clubs and members need to make themselves aware of COVID-19 restrictions that exist at the time of returning to water
2. **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY** – Each person is to take personal responsibility for their own health, safety and decision making
3. **RISK ASSESSMENT** – Individuals, clubs and the associated workforce must ensure that they have assessed the risks associated with the conditions, the equipment, and the experience which lies with going back swimming

## **What has changed as we move into Phases 3 and 4?**

Under PHASE 3 of the Government of Ireland Roadmap:

- People are permitted to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities on an individual basis
- Larger groups (a maximum of 200 people (ROI) and a maximum of 30 people (NI)) are permitted to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities and only where there is no physical contact and current social distancing requirements can be maintained

Once in PHASE 4 of the Government of Ireland Roadmap:

- People are permitted to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities on an individual basis
- Larger groups (a maximum of 500 people in ROI (with NI equivalents to be confirmed) are permitted to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities and only where there is no physical contact and current social distancing requirements can be maintained

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On this basis and in compliance with all of the guidance provided in this document, Clubs are now permitted to run training sessions and begin to look at running races in the open water; however, while groups can comprise of up to 200 swimmers (ROI) or 30 swimmers (NI) for races, for training sessions this number is dependent of the qualification of the coach running the session. The size of this group includes coaches and/or safety personnel also present. Furthermore, it is imperative that logs are kept in relation to which members who train together or attend a race.

Where Clubs intend to engage in club training or hold races, clubs must appoint a COVID-19 Officer/Committee to ensure compliance with this guidance and Governmental directive, to establish the groups referenced above and to ensure that Contact Tracing is enabled as follows:

### Contact Tracing

A key point in public health measures is to ensure that there are clear records at all times of who was in the water at each session and who else was present. These records should be kept digitally in order that they can be transferred easily. This is vitally important to ensure that contact tracing is provided for in the event of a case of the virus presenting itself in one of the Club members.

Participants must ensure that they are fully cognisant of the following recommendations and advices, in association with any other conditions and requirements set by Swim Ireland, Sport Ireland, the HSE/HSC and/or the Government in the return to Open Water swimming. It is important that the below recommendations do not supersede any Government/HSE/PHA/Irish Coast Guard/HSC directives in relation to restriction of movement and/or access to bodies of water

While the current HSE/HSC advice in relation to the impact of COVID-19 in open water (freshwater and saltwater) suggests that the risk of transmission of the virus through water is low, this is still under investigation. The HSE National Bathing Water Group regularly review and update their guidance relating to Bathing Water and Health. This Open Water Framework is designed to help minimise any risk but cannot remove risk completely

### Open Water

#### Safety Guidelines/Training

*At all times individuals should be aware of the general safety rules of Open Water swimming*

*Now that the waterways are getting busier with boat traffic, we urge all swimmers to please be cautious of the area they choose to swim, particular if it is an area where other traffic frequents*

- Ensure that you have considered all of the risks to you, the safety personnel and, if anything goes wrong, the risk of burdening the emergency crews and health services
- Do not swim on your own
- Risk assess your swimming location prior to entering the water, for boat traffic, entry and exit locations, availability of life saving appliances, weather, and water conditions (including algae bloom) and temperature
- Be aware of areas where boats or other vessels frequent and avoid these places
- Always ensure that at least one person knows that you have gone swimming and where you have gone swimming
- Only swim within permitted areas and in areas that you know
- Have an emergency action plan
- Have someone on land as a spotter who is a designated responsible person and point of contact for the Coastguard and / or other emergency services
- Have a Lifeguard and first aider present
- Have a safety kayak or paddle board (where larger groups are swimming together)
- Tow floats are recommended for visibility and safety
- Don't swim out to sea, swim parallel and close to the shore – know your route before you start
- Do not place yourself in a situation where you will need help. It is impossible to maintain social distancing if you need to be rescued
- All swimmers should work off the mantra of '**ARRIVE, SWIM, LEAVE**'.

*Each of us has a responsibility to swim safely and that requires each of us to take proper and sensible precautions*

#### Prior to Each Open Water Swimming Session

- Clubs are now permitted to run training sessions in the open water; training group sizes are dependent on the qualification of the coach leading the session
- Swimmers, coaches and lifeguards should not swim in the Open Water if any cold or flu symptoms are being experienced. If a COVID-19 test is not available to them at this time, this individual should self-isolate for 14 days
- No car-pooling or lift sharing to the sessions for those from different households

- Individuals to practice current required social distancing measures from each other or from lifeguards/anyone else on land
- Swimmers should adhere to the government guidance on social distancing in open spaces (currently 2m but check latest guidance)
- For car parking, it is recommended to park opposite directions, first drives into space, next reverses into space, so changing areas (normally the boot of your car) are spread out in line with social distancing
- No hand shaking or similar contact greetings to occur
- Swimmers should adopt good respiratory hygiene, covering their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze

#### **During Each Open Water Swimming Session**

- No swimmer-swimmer body contact and swimmers to practice current required social distancing measures from each other in when in the water
- Swimmers not to share drinks or foodstuffs prior to, during or after training sessions. Drinks bottles to be clearly marked for ownership and single use drinks bottle (marked with ownership) are preferable
- Swimmers to only use their own training equipment and not use communal training aids owned by a club or similar
- Swimmers not to loan personal training equipment or caps/goggles to each other
- Swimmers should adopt good respiratory hygiene, covering their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze

#### **Following Each Open Water Swimming Session**

- Swimmers to only use their own towels once out of the water and not to share these
- Swimmers should adhere to the government guidance on social distancing in open spaces (currently 2m but check latest guidance)
- Individuals to use hand sanitiser after swimming and to shower at home once returned
- No meetings to be held before or after swims and such meetings to continue to be conducted via online means
- Swimmers to take equipment, (particularly swimwear, goggles, caps & water bottles) home after each swim and wash them thoroughly
- Individuals to practice current required social distancing measures from each other or lifeguards on land
- Swimmers should leave the swimming area and return home once the swim is complete and not congregate for social reasons
- No car-pooling or lift sharing from sessions for those from different households
- Swimmers to shower at home once returned
- Swimmers should adopt good respiratory hygiene, covering their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze

#### **Open Water Racing**

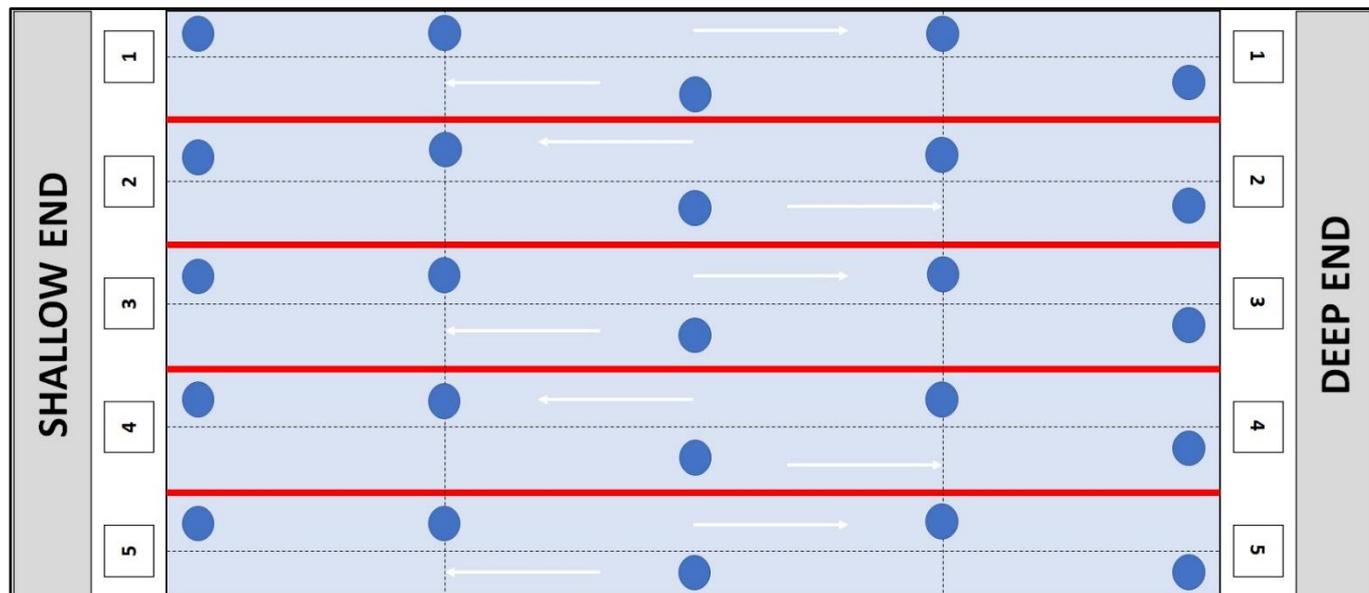
- Swim Ireland have produced Event Protocols and an Event Plan Template for clubs to use
  - One for up to 200 people
  - One for over 200 people (available shortly)
- Clubs must submit an Event Plan two weeks prior to the event. These will be reviewed and kept on file. Clubs holding more than one event are only required to submit a plan for their first event, but are still required to complete a plan for all events without submission to Swim Ireland deemed necessary
- Clubs are required to submit an Event Plan for ANY form of open water race they intend to run – this includes weekly league races

#### **Outdoor Pools**

- The guidance contained in the Swim Ireland Operator's Guidance (available [HERE](#)) is applicable to all pools, including outdoor facilities. The facility will need to ensure that they are following the chemical parameters for outdoor pools and clubs should check this with the facility operator
- A facility operating their swimming pool by disinfecting and maintaining the pH to the advised parameters (as set out in the Swim Ireland Operator's Guidance) will greatly reduce the potential for transmission of COVID-19 in the swimming pool water. In such a scenario, the only likely possible transmission is via air droplets
- Once the pool has confirmed that they are opening, clubs should follow the guidelines outlined in the Swim Ireland Club Swimming/Water Polo Return to Water Framework available [HERE](#);
- Group size is dependent on the qualification of the coach running the session
- Social distancing needs to be practised both in the water and on the pool deck
- The pool and the pool deck need to be completely cleared between one group departing and a further group commencing activity

### Pool Diagram

Please read the complete Club Swimming & Club Water Polo Framework documents for complete information



**Figure 1.** Five athletes per lane for a 25m pool. Lanes would alternate between clockwise and anti-clockwise. The above example allows for a maximum of **25 athletes** to be in the water at any one time.

### Water Polo in Outdoor Pools

- As per the Club Water Polo Framework, basic skills (including treading water, sculling, individual ball handling and unopposed shooting (i.e. no goalkeeper) can be undertaken providing social distancing is observed. More complex skills (passing, opposed shooting) and team play to be introduced at a later date (to be advised)
- Where possible, individuals should bring their own ball to and from a session
- Where a player requires a club ball, they shall be the sole user of this ball during the session. All balls will be cleaned with disinfectant between sessions

### Water Polo in Open Water

- Players looking to take part in Water Polo in Open Water should have experience of an Open Water environment
- Group size is dependent on the qualification of the coach running the session
- Different groups should train at different times
- Social distancing needs to be practised both in the water and on the shore
- Training should only take place on beaches at the times when lifeguards are on duty
- As per the Club Water Polo Framework, basic skills (including treading water, sculling, individual ball handling and unopposed shooting (i.e. no goalkeeper) can be undertaken providing social distancing is observed. More complex skills (passing, opposed shooting) and team play to be introduced at a later date (to be advised)
- Where possible, individuals should bring their own ball to and from a session
- Where a player requires a club ball, they shall be the sole user of this ball during the session. All balls will be cleaned with disinfectant between sessions

### Further Guidance

Please note that these are purely for information purposes and should be considered in line with the above information

<https://www.swimireland.ie/promotions/return-to-water-roadmap>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/eda64a-the-irish-coast-guard/>

<https://www.triathlete.com/training/open-water-swimming-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>

<https://www.swimming.org/openwater/covid19-guidance-open-water-swimmers/>

# Swim Ireland Open Water Swimming

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<https://outdoorswimmer.com/news/swim-england-british-triathlon-and-the-royal-life-saving-society-uk-publish-safety-advice-for-open-water-swimmers-following-the-partial-lifting-of-the-coronavirus-lockdown-restrictions-in-england>

### **Note**

This is a guidance document only. It is for the benefit of members as information. It is not legal advice or intended as a substitute for any applicable government advice. It is also not a substitute for clubs/members/users carrying out their own full risk assessment and review. Swim Ireland does not give a warranty or undertaking as to the advice in this document

This document will be updated following revised government advice as we move into the next phase/step of the roadmap

July 2020