

**SWIM
IRELAND**



**Swim Ireland Open Water Swimming
COVID-19 Return to Water Framework (May 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 published their 'Return to Water' Roadmap which details Swim Ireland's interpretation and recommendations for 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 the Governments published guidelines, it is likely that the recommendations and guidelines within this Roadmap will be updated accordingly. Swim Ireland will work closely with Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, Ireland Active (the industry body for leisure and fitness) and relevant Northern Ireland governmental departments going forwards and has reviewed documentation from other nations and considered advices, including those of the HSE and HSC in relation to the preparation of this Roadmap and other associated documentation. Swim Ireland accepts that it is not possible for any sport to eliminate the risk of the spread of the virus completely and will work with all stakeholders to get to a level of 'tolerable risk' - and this concept must be fully understood and accepted by all Swim Ireland members and the parents of our members who are minors. This document forms part of the further and more detailed guidance associated with the Roadmap.

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 advices 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 18th 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, we are advising that unless you are an experienced open water swimmer, that you should NOT be entering open water. Club swimming/training in indoor pools remains closed (as a minimum) during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Roadmap. We strongly advise against open water swimming for anyone who is not a seasoned sea, lake and/or river swimmer. Prior to swimming, we ask our experienced open water swimmers to 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 that there are no lifeguards on beaches and many open water swimming areas remain closed to prevent wider social gatherings. Experienced Open Water swimmers are also to consider any governmental restrictions which are in place at that time.

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
4. Under PHASE 1 of the Government of Ireland Roadmap:
 - People are permitted to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities on an individual basis
 - Very small groups (a maximum of four people) are permitted to engage in outdoor sporting and fitness activities and only where there is no physical contact and social distancing of 2 metres can be maintained. The Northern Ireland approach mirrors this in most respects
 - Other than in Northern Ireland, people are not permitted to travel more than 5km from their home. This is extended to 20km when Phase 2 commences (circa 8th June 2020)

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

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Government/HSE/Irish Coast Guard/HSC/ directives in relation to restriction of movement and/or access to bodies of water

HSE/HSC Advice

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

Safety Guidelines

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

- Do not swim on your own, but also do not swim in large groups – at this juncture groups should be no more than four people in size
- Stagger swimming time to avoid gatherings of people
- Share an Open Water swimming roster with others who may use the area, to avoid gatherings of people
- 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
- Only swim within permitted areas
- Do not swim in an area of water you do not know
- Know your route before you start – are you swimming point-to-point; out-and-back or following a course
- Be aware of temperature – at this time of the year, most bodies of open water are cold. It is advisable to wear a wetsuit for longer swims particularly if you are not used to swimming in open water. Ensure you know the symptoms of hypothermia
- Be aware of the weather and of currents
- For inland waterways, be aware of the water flow, water quality and algae bloom
- If you are NOT a competent open water swimmer now is NOT the time to learn!
- If you are a competent open water swimmer, 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 place yourself in a situation where you will need help. It is impossible to maintain social distancing if you need to be rescued

Prior to Each Open Water Swim

- 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 2m social distancing from each other or from lifeguards/anyone else on land
- Swimmers to use their own preparation area to get ready to swim
- No hand shaking or similar contact greetings to occur
- No spectators for sessions (except for as outlined above under safety guidelines)

During Each Open Water Swimming Session

- No swimmer-swimmer body contact and swimmers to practice 2m social distancing 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

Following Each Open Water Swimming Session

- Swimmers to only use their own towels once out of the water and not to share these
- Swimmers to use their own preparation area to get ready to return home
- 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 2m social distancing from each other or lifeguards on land

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- 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

Further Guidance

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

<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/>

<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

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