



Open Water Guidelines For Coaching Children & Adults

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Coaching Open Water Swim Sessions

Once a potential site has been identified as a suitable coaching venue, it is essential that the Level 3 coach approaches the water owner/operator for permission, preferably in writing, for open water swimming to take place subject to a full risk assessment including water quality tests (pH, evidence of blue-green algae and other water-borne pathogens).

Sites which cater for other water sports are likely to already undertake regular water quality testing but this must not be assumed. Where water tests are not routinely undertaken advice should be sought from the Environment Agency or Local Authority on who can undertake the necessary tests and the frequency of the testing. It should be agreed in advance who is responsible for the costs associated with the testing.

Under no circumstances should open water swimming activities take place until the results of the tests are known and acceptable readings have been recorded.

Coaching Remits

Level 2 coaches are qualified to deliver open water skills in a pool environment as part of club training sessions, ie removing lane ropes etc.

Level 3 coaches are qualified to deliver open water sessions in lakes, seas rivers etc on their own (coaching ratio dependant). Level 2 can support a level 3 coach in open water environments as an assistant coach to the level 3 only.

Risk Assessment

In most instances, the Level 3 coach will have thought about safety requirements but have not necessarily recorded their findings through the normal risk assessment process. By documenting safety procedures, policies and practices, coaches are able to establish a health and safety audit trail.

This will support the coach in the event of an incident by demonstrating a responsible and proactive approach to managing safety. It will also provide a written template for the coaches of future sessions, particularly club training sessions where club members may take turns to organise the training.

Important:

- the risk assessment, and any subsequent update, should be undertaken at the venue
- the risk assessment and associated safety documents must be "live" and regularly reviewed and updated
- any measures to manage safety identified within the document must be in place (any deviation on the day should be documented*) prior to the session taking place.

* eg change to swim route due to weather conditions

For further information on conducting a full risk assessment, see the coach education course resources, including a risk assessment template.

The risk assessment will assist the coach (and the club/ site owner) to identify whether the body of water is suitable for open water swimming and that participants are not being placed in danger due to the location or condition of the venue. There are a number of factors that need to be considered and documented including both physical hazards and people hazards.

Responsibility for the content of the risk assessment lies with the Level 3 coach (or club if an un-coached session) although a designated third party e.g. a safety officer can be engaged to write the document.

Physical Hazards

These include, but are not restricted to:

- Access and egress, condition and proximity of start and finish points
- Likely water temperature – which will have implications for recommended swimming distances and immersion times
- Currents or eddies
- Water quality
- Hidden, overhanging or underwater hazards
- Other water users
- Depth (changes)
- Conditions underfoot

People Hazards

These include, but are not restricted to:

- groups with mixed ability
- inexperienced open water swimmers
- over-confident
- low body fat – reduced cold water tolerance

The risk assessment document should also be supported by additional background information including:

- description of venue – including maps, diagrams of swim course
- nature of water – lake, river, sea etc
- contact details for owner / operator
- average water temperatures for period of use
- water quality
- access arrangements for club
- access arrangements for emergency vehicles
- normal operating procedures
- emergency Action Plan
- use by other activities (sailing, windsurfing, jet ski etc)

Participant: Coach Ratios

It is recommended that level 3 coaches should adhere to a limit of **1:20** participants or **1:40** if supported by level 2 coaches. Please consider the numbers of participants attending if the session is being advertised as a coached session.

Sessions should only be coached from the water's edge/pontoon/ water craft (kayak, rowing or motor boat - not in the water, as per pool based coaching sessions.

The ratio of athletes to coach will be ultimately be dependent on safety provision (lifeguards/ safety craft provision) and risk assessment related to venue; water and weather conditions/ lake or sea swim.

If the Level 3 coach or assistant coaches are not comfortable with operating available safety craft, then a suitably competent operator should be sought to fulfil this role, to enable the coach to deliver the session.

The Club Open Water Session Rules

- no entry into the water will be allowed until all safety arrangements are in place and the safety officer/session leader has indicated that it is safe to do so
- wetsuits must be worn at all times*
- brightly coloured swim hats must be worn by swimmers
- swimmers will use a defined course set by the session leader/coach- using landmarks where buoys etc are not available
- swimmers are to swim parallel to the bank / shore where possible
- safety cover will be provided at all sessions and this will not be below the required minimum standard identified in the venue risk assessment
- register to be taken before entry into the water and after the session
- all participants to have provided their emergency contact details along with any medical issues to the session leader/coach. This information will be recorded
- before every session a pre-swim briefing will be given. This will provide clear guidance on the session, the group structure, the course to be swum, and information on what to do if a swimmer experiences difficulty
- sessions will not enter into water space used for other activities
- all sessions will finish at the allotted time

*See British Triathlon Rulebook for specific water temperatures

- At each session a First Aid kit should be available
- A safety officer should be appointed before each session. This person will be responsible for liaising with the venue operator / owner to ascertain water quality issues. The safety officer has the final decision on whether a session can proceed. The safety officer will remain on the bank and not participate in the swimming activity
- Each session will have a leader who will make themselves known to all relevant personnel

Open Water Participant User Rules:

Before taking part in an open water coached training session, swimmers must:

- Provide the session leader with information about any medical issues
- Provide their emergency contact details
- Sign up to the club's safety code and rules for open water swimming
- Swim within their own ability and adhere to any directions given by the safety officer/session coach and anyone providing safety cover
- Be of a **Minimum age of 8 years old** (as at 31st December in the current year)

- Be a competent swimmer in a swimming pool environment.
- For TriStar competitors, be able to swim double the distance of the event

Emergency Action Plan

In addition to the Normal Operating Procedures (NOP), organisers/ Coaches should also develop an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) which details what action should be undertaken in the event of a foreseeable incident. This might include:

- injury to a swimmer
- hypothermia
- drowning
- distressed swimmer
- deteriorating weather e.g. lightning, high winds, poor visibility
- an unauthorized craft entering the swimming zone

Consideration should be given to roles and responsibilities, communication (on site and externally e.g. ambulance service), medical provision, provision of blankets, access of emergency vehicles, recovery of swimmers from the water, access to safety equipment e.g. throw ropes, lifebuoys, Safety craft

Where possible it is advisable to practice scenarios to test the EAP remembering that when an incident does occur safety cover needs to be maintained for all swimmers and that all attention should not be focused on where an incident is occurring.

General Advice for Coaching Open Water Swimming Sessions

Whilst water quality tests provide an indication of the suitability of a venue for open water swimming they do not mean that there is a complete absence of potential pathogens. There are simple practices that triathletes should be advised to adopt to minimise risk of infections further.

- cover all cuts and abrasions, however minor, with sticking plasters. You should not consider swimming if you have deep cuts
- wash hands in fresh water before eating after you have swum
- take a full shower at the earliest opportunity
- try to ingest a minimum amount of water whilst swimming

Coaching Children in Open Water Environments:

All previous generic open water coaching guidelines apply to coaching children. Where possible swim courses should be of multiple laps to allow participants to be monitored by coaches/ spotters/ marshals and also give participants the option to not complete the full distance for whatever reason.

Race Distance Guidelines

- Tristar Start 25m
- Tristar 1 50m
- Tristar 2 100m
- Tristar 3 250m
- Youth 400m

Participant Suitability

Competitors must be able to comfortably swim double their age category distance in a pool environment before taking part in the open water session.

Rule Amendments (Children in Open Water)

9.2 No maximum thickness for wetsuits (TSS – TS3 only)

9.3 Wetsuits compulsory

9.4 Water temperature must be 14 degrees centigrade or above

10.1 Maximum of 25m between safety craft

10.2 A minimum requirement of 1 safety craft to every 10 competitors

10.4 The lead craft must remain within 10 meters of the lead swimmer

All other rules remain unchanged

Ends