



International Experts in Safety Training Solutions



Baby Swimming Policy

There is a great deal of confusion regarding baby swimming, principally the areas of concern are:

- The earliest date at which babies can be introduced to the swimming pool
- Submersions

Starting Baby Swimming

The policy of the STA, with regard to introducing babies to aquatic activities is:

- Babies should only be introduced to water in line with the most recent recommendations from the Department of Health. This can be found on www.sta.co.uk. The current recommendation, at the date of publication, is “your baby does not need any immunisations before they go swimming”.
- The teacher should ensure that the midwife, health visitor or doctor is happy for the baby to be introduced to a public swimming pool.
- The water and air temperature must be higher than for normal public swimming; at least 30°C (32°C for babies under 3 months old or weighing less than 5.5 kilos/12 lbs).
- Baby swimming during the first six month should not take place in sea-water (see explanatory note 1).
- Babies should wear specialised waterproof nappies, and ideally double nappies, to prevent leakage.
- Very careful introduction must be carried out to prevent a long-term fear of water being developed.
- The teaching of babies and infants should only be undertaken by holders of a suitable specialist teaching certificate such as the STA Baby and Pre-School Certificate.

Submersion Policy

The policy of the STA relates to intentional submersion as a practice in a structured session. It is not intended to include accidental submersions or quick dunks which may well happen on a frequent basis (see explanatory note 2):

Introduction

- Submersion is an important part of introducing babies to the aquatic environment but should not be the dominant focus as it can be counterproductive to a good foundation in swimming.
- Forced submersion is not best practice; it must not be carried out.
- Submersion should only take place when the baby is ready and only then as part of a fun exercise.
- Submersion at an inappropriate time will lead to distress and may result in a baby permanently being frightened of water.
- Submersion practices should be progressive and should be stopped immediately if the baby shows any signs of distress or unhappiness.
- Submersion should only take place when the baby is prepared and involved in the fun; it should not be attempted when the baby is looking away or is unaware of what is about to happen.
- The frequency, depth and duration of submersions should be controlled within the guidelines set out below (see explanatory note 3).

Frequency of Intentional Submersions

- The frequency of intentional submersions should be based on the baby's age, physical ability and experience. It will also depend upon the swimming teacher's style and technique of teaching.
- The number of intentional submersions per session should be built up progressively at the baby's pace. It is suggested that an appropriate rate on increase would be an increase of 6 submersions over 6 sessions.
- As a guideline the STA suggests that the following frequencies be used:
 - For babies under 6 months old a maximum of 6 intentional submersions per session; in addition the baby may make a number of accidental submersions. Initially there may only be one or two submersions, building up to more as the baby develops in age, physical ability and experience.
 - For babies aged 6 to 12 months old the number of intentional submersions can be built up to a maximum of 12 intentional submersions per session in addition to any accidental submersions.
 - For toddlers over 12 months old there need be no upper limit.

Depth of Submersion

- The depth of submersion is dependent upon age, physical ability and experience of the baby. The STA recommend that:
 - No baby under 12 months should be submerged to a depth greater than 1 metre.
 - Babies and toddlers over 12 months can progressively build up to a maximum submersion depth of 1.5 metres.

Duration of Submersion

- Babies under 12 months can progressively build up to a submersion time of 3 seconds.
- Babies and toddlers over 12 months can progressively build up to a submersion time of 10 seconds.

Explanatory Notes

1. The natural swallowing reflex in young babies means that some water will enter the stomach and in cases where it contains salt, the salt will be absorbed. The kidneys of very young children are not developed enough to handle salt; salt overdosing can lead to serious illness and in extreme circumstances death.
2. An intentional submersion would be to a maximum depth and duration as specified in the policy above and would be carried out within a structured baby swimming session. Where the submersion activity involves more than 1 short submersion, within a duration specified in the policy, e.g. mini dunks then this should count as 1 submersion. See chapter 14 in Baby & Pre-school Aquatics Training Manual by STA for further explanations and definitions.
3. The principal concern surrounding the number of submersions a baby undertakes is related to water intoxication (hyponatremia). There has not been significant or recent research on this subject other than that carried out by Karl G Rosen, MD, PhD, published by the Swedish Paediatric Association in collaboration with the Swedish Board of Health and Welfare together with the Swedish Swimming Association. His research has shown that a baby needs to drink at least 10% of its body weight for the risk of water intoxication to occur. In a study of 15 babies below the age of 6 months, undertaking a 20 minute swimming session consisting of between 5 and 10 submersions, 7 of the babies increased their body weight by a maximum of 1.6%.