



STA OPEN WATER SWIMMING GUIDANCE

Introduction

As a national governing body for swimming and a leading awarding organisation that trains hundreds of professional open water swimming coaches every year, guidance is presented here in follow-up to the Government announcing that outdoor swimming will be permitted – while maintaining social distancing – in England from Wednesday 13th May under the new rules designed to ease lockdown measures.

Please note: This guidance only applies to England.

First and foremost, STA wants to set-out that we do NOT support any form of outdoor swimming, be it in the sea, lake, river, reservoir, being undertaken (by an individual on their own or with people from their household or with one person from outside of their household) in unsupervised or non-lifeguarded bodies of water at the present time.

Although open water swimming has many benefits and can be undertaken safely, without suitable professional supervision, at this time it does pose an increased threat to life; therefore, STA does not recommend anyone new to swimming or new to open water swimming goes into a body of open water alone.

STA would encourage swimmers to also consider the moral as well as safety aspects of going into open water. Is this the time to try an activity which already has safety implications and which could leave a swimmer in a potentially vulnerable position and needing help from the already overstretched emergency services.

Open water can include lakes, rivers, and the sea, however, swimmers must be aware of the differences between open water and a swimming pool. Even the most competent pool swimmers are not necessarily confident and safe in open water.

Year on year, we tragically record the highest number of drownings during the summer months, so this message is even more timely and even more pertinent given the current situation and the Prime Minister's announcement.

However, if a swimmer decides to heed this advice; STA recommends the safest way to partake in open water swimming at this present time, is with a professionally trained open water swimming coach who will be able to risk assess the situation whilst adhering to social distancing rules. There are many increased dangers with open water swimming, which is why it is recommended that for anyone deciding to go, they do so under the instruction of a qualified open water swimming coach with relevant lifesaving supervision.

Safety First

Swimmers who do decide to go open water swimming, should always follow these best practice recommendations:

- Do not go swimming alone – always ensure someone is supervising and knows where they are swimming, and when they should return
- Always follow the water safety code and relevant signage
- Swim with a qualified open water swimming coach who has all precautions in place
- Swimmers should have all the appropriate equipment, such as a wetsuit, swim hats, goggles, post swim warm clothing and tow float
- Ensure all equipment is cleaned and disinfected after the swim
- Social distancing must be maintained throughout the swimming session, swimmers should be a minimum of 2 metres apart
- Ensure there is appropriate safety cover available – please note that there are currently no RNLI lifeguarded beaches.

Swimmers must also be aware that water temperatures are colder than swimming pools, therefore, if a swimmer is not used to these temperatures they should go with someone properly trained in acclimatisation techniques. Any swimmer entering open water must acclimatise and make sure there is a warm place to change and dry after the swim.

Note: Aside from the obvious dangers of swimming in unsupervised waters, swimming in seas and rivers poses many other risks from hidden currents and underwater hazards. However, one of the most dangerous aspects of open water swimming is cold water shock, which is the bodies response to being in cold water – always remember the water may seem temptingly warm on the surface but underneath the surface where the heat of the sun cannot reach the water is likely to be very cold and can catch even the strongest of swimmers out.



Guidance for Open Water Swimming Coaches

If open water swimming coaches do decide to recommence their coaching, they must ensure the following procedures are in place and consider the following guidance to ensure swimmers safety at all times:

- A detailed risk assessment must be in place
- The Normal Operating Plan and Emergency Action Plan has been reviewed and is up-to date to include Covid-19 recommendations
- The venue is safe for swimming, including all water checks are up to date and open water coaches have the venue's permission where required
- Coaching ratios are reviewed / reduced to maintain social distancing, this could mean offering one to one sessions
- Appropriate lifesaving and first aid cover for the venue is in place
- Lifesaving and first aid cover – make sure the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment is available, such as gloves, face mask, antibacterial hand gel
- For guidance on CPR procedures see, <https://www.resus.org.uk/media/statements/resuscitation-council-uk-statements-on-covid-19-coronavirus-cpr-and-resuscitation/covid-community/>
- Social distancing is maintained throughout the pre-swim, coaching session / swim and post swim
- Sanitised hand gel or hand washing facilities are available at the start and end of the swim
- The swimmer or open water swimming coach have no signs or symptoms of Covid-19
- The swimmer and open water swimming coach have the appropriate equipment such as wetsuit, tow floats, swim hats, goggles
- The swimmer is acclimatised to the open water and during the first part of the swim / session the swimmer undertakes acclimatisation activities
- All equipment is cleaned and disinfected after swimming and use
- There are dry and suitable facilities for post swim changing and the swimmer has brought warm dry clothing
- Make sure you are insured to coach and have all the appropriate safety cover in place.



Insurance

Coaches need to make sure they are insured to coach and have all the appropriate safety cover in place.

For all STA coaches who are current members they are insured if:

1. The member is acting as an individual
2. The member is acting within their qualification
3. And are carrying out an activity described in the business description of the policy

AND

1. They are following government guidelines in respect of Covid-19 rules
2. And they are using open water which is permitted to be "open" by government or local authority.

Then cover will continue to apply under the normal terms of the policy.



Risk Assessments

Open water swimming coaches should develop, implement, monitor and continually review their risk assessments, including the potential of someone being exposed to Covid-19.

For risk assessment guidance and examples please visit: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/>

Key considerations when undertaking a risk assessment, but are not limited to, the following:

- What is the latest government advice and advice from industry experts on control measures?
- What is the current advice from the NHS about the current situation and numbers for Covid-19 cases in the local community / region?
- What are the current legal requirements from the Government (e.g. public health orders, health directions, business requirements)?
- Does open water swimming coaching increase the risk of open water swimming coaches and swimmers being exposed to Covid-19?
- Does the venue have hand washing and / or hand sanitising facilities?
 - Are these sufficiently stocked and in good working order?
 - Can the open water swimming coach bring these with them?
- Does the coaching delivery increase the risk of the open water swimming coach and / or swimmers being exposed to Covid-19 and can this be changed?
 - Can the session ratio be reduced or to one to one to ensure social distancing?
 - Are there high contact points, such as doors, handles etc within the changing facilities? If so, what steps can be taken to reduce the risks at these points, i.e. swimmers arriving in swim wear, changing in their car, regular cleaning of these areas?
 - Can modifications be made to enable increased social distancing?
- What the current cleaning and disinfecting arrangements?
 - Are they consistent with government guidance?
 - Are there, or is there access to, sufficient and appropriate cleaning supplies, including disinfectants?
 - Have frequently touched surfaces been identified and cleaned?
 - Can equipment be cleaned after every use?
- Is there a plan to review control measures to ensure they are effective?

Safety and common sense must prevail at all times.

