

Returning to the pool

Guidance for **Operators**

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Covid-19: Returning to the pool

Foreword

We have all been missing the water during the Covid-19 enforced closure of swimming pools. For many of our members across all our disciplines, this will have been the longest period out of the water, which can take a toll on both our physical and mental wellbeing.

As the recognised national governing body, Swim England is therefore delighted to be able to produce this guidance to help ensure the safe return to the water once swimming pools are allowed to open once more.

Our first priority remains the safety of everyone involved in our sports, be they participants, leisure centre staff, coaches or volunteers. We will at all times be led by the latest government guidance and regulations. This guidance has been produced in collaboration with experts from across the sector and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to its creation.

The guidance covers a range of settings and audiences, including;

- Operators
- Users
- Swimming Lessons
- Community Swimming
- Clubs.

When pools reopen, it will not be a case of ‘business as usual’ and we know that things will have to be different, but if we are to play our part in protecting the NHS from another wave of Covid-19 admissions, it is important we follow the latest guidance and adjust to the new ‘normal’.

Swim England will continue to push for more financial support for the swimming sector to ensure we can all continue to enjoy the sports we love.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane M Nickerson".

Jane Nickerson
Chief Executive, Swim England

Guidance for Operators

Introduction

This document has been developed in co-operation with industry partners, UK Active, Public Health England and Sport England. It aims to support operators in re-opening swimming facilities following the period of closure, due to Covid-19, and provides guidance on reducing the risk of Covid-19 transmission within the swimming pool environment.

It will highlight the continued requirements for safe social distancing and enhanced hygiene regimes, along with guidance on how this will impact on the operational management of swimming facilities. The guide will include details on getting pools back to operational requirements, certification, programming, understanding the new needs of users coming out of isolation (especially the most vulnerable) and protecting and training the workforce.

Other sections will provide guidance for pool users and practical advice relating to the control of Covid-19 in swimming facilities and during various activities. Links to best practice and other industry standard guidance will be provided where appropriate.

As with all environments, there is still a level of risk of Covid-19 transmission in aquatic settings that requires control measures to be implemented, based on your Covid-19 Risk Assessment.

If you have any questions relating to the guidance, please contact guidance@swimming.org.

Operator guidance

Covid-19 Officer

Operator should have a dedicated officer responsible for Covid-19 considerations, making sure that they are up to date with central or local government recommendations. This person should be aware of the rules and guidance set out by the facility.

Essential guidance and standards

Operators should also ensure they are continuing to comply with The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and are operating in accordance with the following guidance and standards:

- The Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group (PWTAG) Code of Practice (pwtag.org).
- The Swimming Pool Water Book (pwtag.org).
- PWTAG Technical notes (pwtag.org).
- BS EN 13451 Swimming pool equipment. BS EN 15288 part 1 and 2 swimming pools for public use, safety requirements for design and operation.
- HSG 179 – Health & Safety in Swimming Pools.
- **Guidance for Swimming Pool Operators Managing Lifeguards during Covid-19.**
- **UK Active: Covid-19 A framework for the reopening of gym, leisure centre and wider fitness industry during social distancing.**

Pool water and pool hall management

Pool water

The Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group (PWTAG) is the recognised body for swimming water quality standards in the UK, operators should ensure their pool is operating within the guidance detailed in PWTAG technical notes which can be found at pwtag.org.

UK swimming pools are commonly disinfected with chlorine (as a primary disinfectant) with a secondary disinfection method in the form of UV light. SARS-CoV-2 is an enveloped virus that is likely to be more sensitive to chlorination than, for example, non-enveloped enterovirus such as adenovirus (World Health Organisation, 2020). There are no Ct values for SARS-CoV-2, but a reported Ct-value (4-log reduction) for adenovirus is 0.75 mg/L min at pH 7.0 (Thurston-Enriquez et al, 2003).

This enables the pool operator to state with confidence that Covid-19 would not be transmissible through the swimming pool water if the pool is operated in line with this guidance and that of PWTAG.

Covid-19 Recommended Pool Chemical levels

Free Chlorine – min 1.5mg/l

pH – 7.0

Air handling/circulation in pool halls

Most air conditioning systems do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings, or operators are unsure, advice should be sought from an appropriate heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineer or adviser.

All heating/cooling, ventilation systems should be checked by a suitably qualified person prior to opening and a separate risk assessment carried out to consider points including increasing natural and mechanical ventilation whilst maintaining acceptable internal environment conditions (air velocity, temperature, humidity, Ventilation/ACH) and the short or long term solutions considered and applied.

Although it can be difficult to definitively prove airborne transmission, knowledge of other similar viruses and the emerging evidence showing high rates of infection in poorly ventilated rooms suggests that we should consider this as a potential transmission route and undertake measures to reduce that risk. These small droplets may be breathed in and cause infection.

Until the understanding of the significance of the various transmission routes of SARS-CoV2 develops, operators should consider increasing the rate of supply of outside air to occupants wherever it is practical as a precautionary measure. Anecdotal evidence shows that warmer temperatures and high humidity all play a part in mitigating the risk of airborne transmission. Additionally the increased ratio of air to participants in a swimming pool hall lowers the risk further.

This guidance is subject to change as SARS-CoV2 transmission routes become more clearly defined. Until then this takes a risk averse approach to reduce indoor pollution without significant capital expenditure.

Outdoor pools

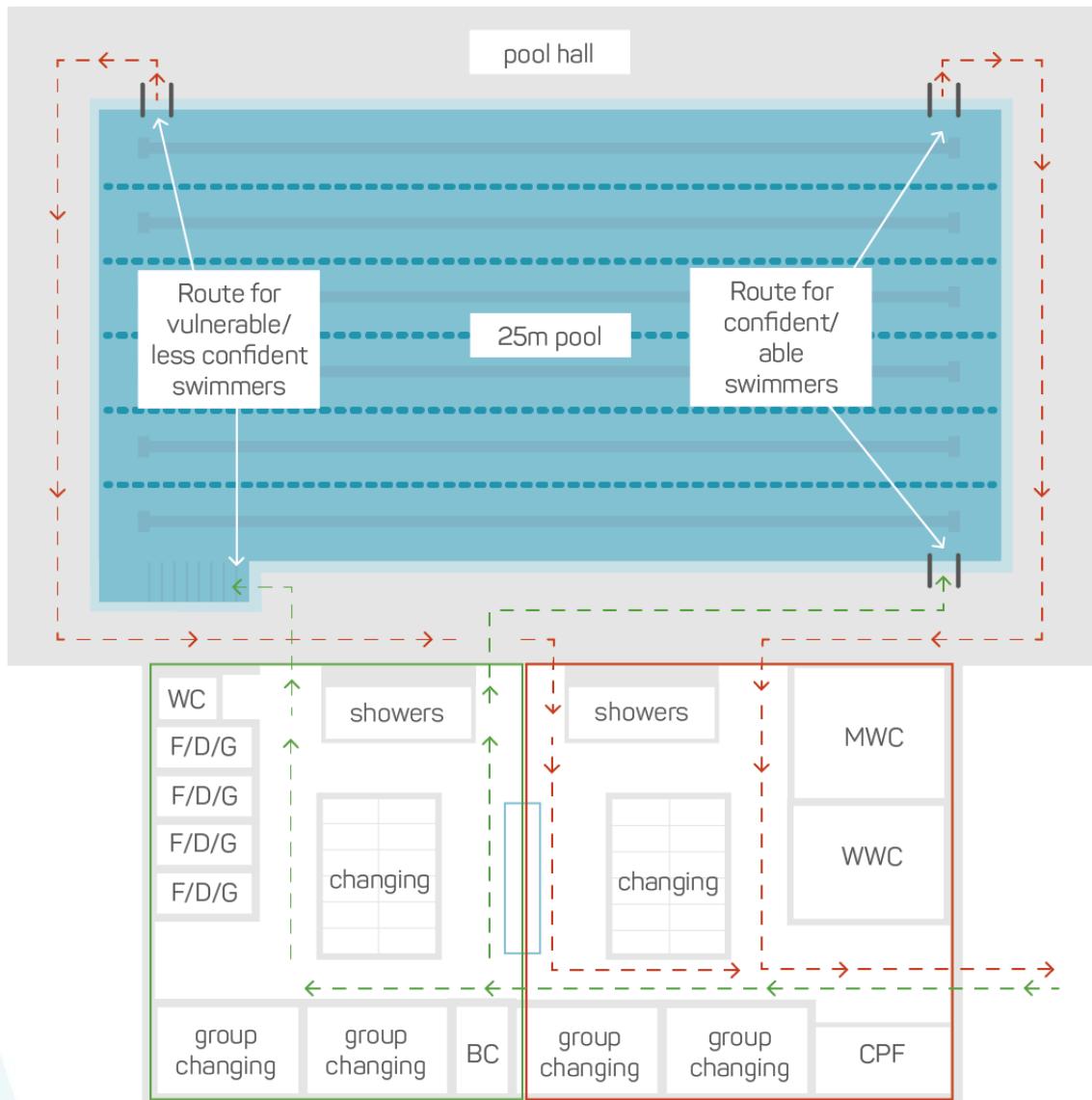
This guidance is applicable to all pools including outdoor facilities, the requirements relating to air handling/circulation will not need to be applied to outdoor facilities. Please ensure you follow PWTAG TN46 for the chemical parameters of outdoor pools.

Risk assessment

Reflecting pool operators' obligation in law to undertake a risk assessment, the following will help you assess the risk and make the appropriate adjustments.

A facility operating their swimming pool, disinfection and pH to the advised parameters as set out on pwttag.org will greatly reduce the potential for transmission of Covid-19 in the swimming pool water, therefore we must focus on reducing the potential transmission via inhalation of air droplets within the atmosphere and touch points around the building.

Entry and egress from the pool tank are pinch points where users may congregate and should be considered. Implementing a one-way system of entry and exit is a possible solution to reducing this risk.



Risk assessing social distancing in the water

Maintaining social distancing is paramount in order to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid 19 between participants, this is important both whilst in and out of the water.

Government Guidance outline: **Staying alert and safe (social distancing)** published 11 May 2020.

"Individuals should keep their distance from people outside their household, wherever possible. Transmission is affected by both duration and proximity of contact"

Therefore in the process of assessing risk, and determining maximum occupancies for swimming activities, operators should consider methods to adjust the following variables:

Distance: The greater the distance between participants the lower the level of risk of transmission via air droplets.

Duration: The shorter the duration (time) at which participants are within close proximity, the lower the level of risk of transmission via air droplets.

Activity: The way in which participants move during the activity will determine how you can control the above 2 parameters, for example lane swimming is a controlled setting where participants are guided to swim in a set direction.

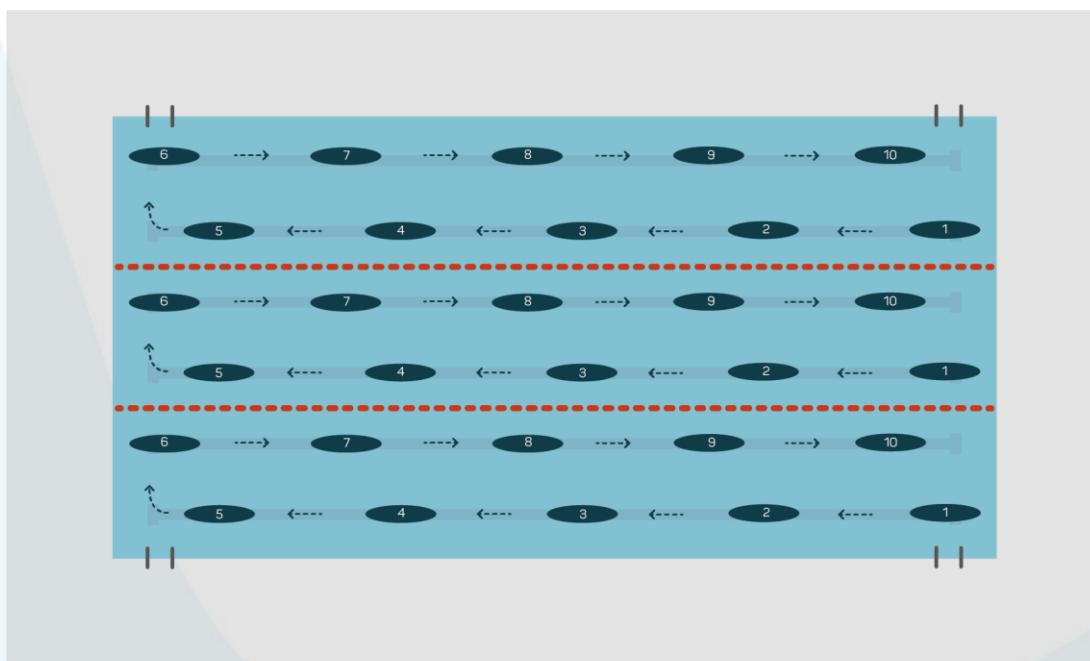
Consequently, the further the distance away from other participants the lower the risk level of transmission and the less time they are within close proximity of another person, this lowers again the risk of transmission. The combination of both, along with the type of activity, provides a risk factor profile that operators can use to determine what and how specific activities within the pool can be programmed.

Therefore whilst static in the, participants should be assisted in maintaining a 2 metre distance, however whilst travelling, duration can be considered as a mitigating factor to risk. For example, during a swimming lesson where the activity is controlled, it is likely unavoidable that the distance between the participants may be less than 2 metres whilst passing, the duration of time would be significantly low, providing reassurance that the risk of transmission of infection would be low enough to be deemed as acceptable.

Maximum pool capacities – taking the above parameters into account; distance, time and activity, we recommended that the pool operator does not permit a bather load of any less than 6 square metre per participant during any activity. This minimum recommendation would enable social distancing to be maintained in the strictest of controlled settings.

However, each activity should be assessed individually to ascertain the specific bather loading, considering the activities effect on the distance and time at which swimmers can maintain safe social distancing. For example, an activity such as a public swim session where participants are moving freely and more randomly around the designated area in the pool will require a higher square metre area per participant in order to maintain a safe level of risk. In comparison an activity like aqua aerobics where movement is controlled and close contact can be easily avoided, a lower square metre area per participant such as a minimum of 6 square metre should be sufficient. Other factors such as depth, demographics of the participants and ability should also be considered.

Example pool layout for lane swimming



Lane swimming 25x12.5m pool 10 to a double lane

Family swimming

Swimming with members of the same household would not require the social distancing measures detailed above, however swimmers must be well informed and aware that they must maintain the social distancing guidance above with any other swimmers not within their household and staff at all times. For carers the same principles would apply.

Children

Using the guidance set out above in the “risk assessing social distancing in the water” section, any programmed session in the pool for children should attempt to maintain social distancing in line with government advice and risk assess on age and ability. Swimming lessons should be supervised and where possible staff should continue to follow social distancing principles.

Moderate risk users

Those that are categorised as moderate risk of developing complications from Covid-19 infection by the government, such as those over 70 and those who are pregnant, may still wish to take part in aquatic activities when pools reopen. Operators should consider how they will control risk to these user groups through their programme.

Inclusion and disabled users

- Those who are high risk or shielding should follow the medical guidance issued to them at all times.
- Members of public who use assistance dogs should be allowed to access facilities. Assistance dogs should not be patted or smoothed by anybody else other than the person they are there to support and their family/pod. There is further [guidance available from Assistance Dogs UK](#) animal and plant health agency. If someone does touch the dog, they should wash their hands.
- If a member of public needs to use a chair to access poolside consider where this can be best placed in the new system for people to enter and exit the facility.
- Consider placement of clocks or resources to aid independence for those with impairments whilst undertaking activity.
- Operators should encourage users that require additional support or use of disabled facilities, including disabled changing and pool pods/hoists, to make contact with the facility in advance of their visit. This will avoid multiple users needing to use the disabled facilities at the same time and allow time for the changing facilities and equipment to be cleaned before they may be needed again.
- For more information and guidance around inclusion, please visit [Activity Alliance](#).

Customer journey

Pre-booking

Advice to pool users should be at all times to attempt to maintain social distancing i.e. when stopping/standing in the water or whilst on poolside and within the changing rooms. In order to control capacities in these areas operators may choose to run using bookable sessions only, which will be subjected to the new maximum occupancy levels in the pool and the

impact changing rooms may have on these numbers. Operators should implement an effective method of controlling and recording the numbers of pool users. There are various ways to do this, such as coloured band systems, locker tokens/keys, access kiosks, pre-booked admissions and turnstiles.

Information for pool users

Any pool will be safer if users are aware of the potential of Covid-19 transmission, and act responsibly, as far as is reasonably practicable. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, such as notices and signs displayed at reception, in changing areas and on the poolside and information on websites.

Safety information and signs

Safety signs should be considered as a part of an operator's package of risk control measures. They can be used to warn and remind the users to maintain social distancing. Where provided, pool operators should maintain safety signs, ensure that signs are located in appropriate positions and unobstructed, for example by equipment or plant and explain the signs to their employees and tell them what they should do when they see a safety sign.

Reception areas

- Hand wipes/sanitisers will be on offer (or directed to where people can clean hands)
- Gloves are not mandatory as the WHO advice is that it is preferable not to wear gloves but to regularly wash your hands.
- Screens protecting reception staff are preferable but are optional.
- Queue management – 2 metre spacing bars on the floor and if necessary outside the entrance.
- Encourage only one parent/guardian to escort the swimmer if required to all activities.
- Parents encouraged to only turn up for their lesson time.
- Display/provide users with the social distancing guidance.
- Make regular announcements to remind users to follow social distancing advice and clean their hands regularly.

Access routes and corridors

Ideally, where practicable, a one-way system should be introduced and areas of contact/touch points reduced.

Changing rooms

Swimmers have a personal responsibility as does the operator in this critical part of the swimming journey. The management of occupancy levels and reviewing both the hygiene and cleaning regime are important. The requirements for social distancing need to be considered which will include the consideration of the size, style ('village style', changing rooms, group change etc.) as well as the layout of changing rooms to determine changing room capacities enabling social distancing to be respected by customers and time allocated for cleaning.

To mitigate the effect of this, facilities may want to consider a ‘beach style turn up and swim’ option to minimise time spent in the changing rooms or allow access straight to poolside.

What is ‘**beach style turn up and swim**’?

- Come ready changed (costume under clothing) – cubicles or individual changing rooms will be available.
- We encourage swimmers to shower directly before leaving home. Showers will be available at the pool.
- Whilst taking account of safeguarding, operators may wish to consider additional designated changing areas with temporary screening.

What will ‘**beach style turn up and swim**’ mean?

- Less time spent in changing areas and more time to swim.
- Showers will be available for a post swim shower.

In changing areas operators should:

- provide washing facilities and hand sanitiser
- consider hygiene arrangements to limit surface contamination in cubicles, lockers and toilets
- consider floor stickers/markings indicating 2 metre distancing in open plan single sex changing rooms, locker and shower areas
- establish occupancy levels to assist social distancing arrangements
- implement effective cleaning regimes, paying particular attention to touch points.

Slides flumes and other features

These activities would need to be risk assessed on an individual basis to ensure the risk of transmission of Covid-19 can be adequately controlled. Considerations for social distancing whilst waiting to ride the slide/flume and cleaning of surfaces must be made.

Diving boards and starting blocks

As above, the use of diving boards and starting blocks would need to be risk assessed on an individual basis, considering surface contamination.

More detailed guidance for operators on running community swimming and instructor led sessions can be found in the [**Swim England Guidance for Community Swimming**](#).

More detailed guidance for operators on running swimming lessons can be found in the [**Swim England Guidance for Swimming Lessons**](#).

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Aqua Aims Swim School

Swim Buddies Swim School

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Directive; Safe Swimming in Corona Time, Hygiene and Disinfection in Bath Establishments version 5, 20200508; Dr.ir. Maarten Keuten, researcher swimming pools TU Delft / Hellebrekers / VTZ, Drs. Jan Bakker, clinical occupational physician, Swimming pool clinic, AMC.

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