

Recreational Swimming

Recreational swimming occurs where learning swimming and water safety is not the prime objective. Recreational swimming is often less structured than sessions designed to teach swimming and water safety and may occur in a range of environments. For this reason, and to provide quality supervision, the requirements vary for recreational swimming at various types of venues. (For swimming sessions designed to teach swimming and water safety see the [Schools Reference Guide 4.4.](#))

Environment

Recreational swimming environments may include dams, natural inland lakes and rivers and marine and coastal environments. These natural venues need sensitive use and management. Swimming environments may offer opportunities for the study of unique flora and fauna however they are very susceptible to long lasting damage from human activity.

The distinguishing features of recreational swimming environments, which influence the activity and educational experience offered, include size of the body of water, depth and turbidity, wind, sun, the strength of tides and currents, the presence and power of waves, and water and air temperature.

When preparing for recreational swimming, consider ways to minimise the environmental impact of the activity.

Location

Due to the unique nature of each location, a specific assessment of suitability must be made by the teacher responsible for the activity prior to the trip.

Your choice of location should be based upon the recent and first hand knowledge of at least one member of the planning and supervising staff. Where this is impractical, planning and supervising staff should be thoroughly familiar with the general characteristics and conditions found in similar locations, and have consulted people who can supply recent and first-hand knowledge of the locations being considered.

When assessing the suitability of a location, consider:

- The potential to support your educational objectives.
- The level of access to the resources, services and facilities that you need or would like to use. These might include campsites, water, walking trails, toilets, shelter from extreme weather, or interpretive information.
- The level of access to communications and external assistance in the event of an emergency, or extreme weather conditions. The more effectively remote

your location is, the more self-contained and self-reliant your group must be and this must be taken into account in the planning of the activity.

- The potential exposure to environmental hazards and difficulties.
- The activity ability and fitness of students.

Contact with relevant authorities should be made in order to access up-to-date management information, and to determine any access and permit requirements.

These authorities may include:

- [Emergency services](#)
- [Parks Victoria](#) (or other land managers)
- [Department of Sustainability and Environment](#)
- [Marine Safety Victoria](#)
- [Lifesaving Victoria](#)

Groups need to be aware that extreme weather conditions may develop prior to or during the proposed trip. Staff should be prepared to cancel, modify or relocate the activity at any time.

Swimming locations are categorised into three venue types described below. Where conditions change, a location that was previously considered a Type 1 venue could become a Type 2 or 3 venue.

Venue Type 1

Type 1 venues include municipal and commercial swimming pools, as well as willow, calm, confined swimming areas at natural venues such as lakes, dams and non-surf beaches. A willow, natural-water venue is defined as a venue where the maximum depth of the water is no greater than shoulder height for any of the students involved in the program. The water in Type 1 venues is clear.

Venue Type 2

Type 2 venues include deep and/or flowing water at non-surf beaches, lakes, channels, rivers and dams. The water in Type 2 venues is clear.

Venue Type 3

Type 3 venues include all beaches with direct access to ocean waters, any beach exposed to ocean swell, and any river, beach or lake that is exposed to strong currents or strong wind or large waves. If the water is not clear at Type 1 & 2 venues, those venues will be considered as Type 3 venues.

Given the range of different conditions that might exist between apparently similar recreational swimming venues, adequate knowledge of the specific venue should be obtained before school programs are conducted.

Communication

Your communication strategy should enable you to receive weather forecasts and warnings, communicate with the school, and engage support in the case of an incident or emergency.

- Choose communication equipment based on current communication technology.
- Develop a communication strategy for the group during the program and to enable communication with outside parties including the school and emergency services.
- Be aware of the limitations of your communication strategy.

Weather

Check the weather forecast for the location in the days leading up to the program and on the day the program commences. If the program extends overnight, monitor and assess the weather throughout and based on that information, access daily weather forecasts and warnings.

Weather conditions can change rapidly. Monitor and assess the weather throughout the activity and be prepared to cancel, modify or relocate at any time.

Weather warning telephone services:

- Coastal, Land Weather and Flood Warnings: 1300 659 217
- Full State Telephone Weather Service: 1900 955 363 (call charge applies)
- Coastal Waters Telephone Service: 1900 969 930 (call charge applies)
- Victorian Bushfire Information Line: 1800 240 667

These telephone numbers may be useful to have available on your program.

Web links:

- [Bureau of Meteorology](#)
- [Current weather warnings for Victoria](#)
- [Current fires](#)
- [Coastal waters forecasts for Victoria](#)
- [Telephone weather services directory: Victoria](#)

Transportation

The transportation of groups to and from activity locations must be carefully considered and planned.

- Vehicles used to transport students must comply with [VicRoads](#) registration requirements.

- Drivers must comply with all licensing requirements.
- Equipment carried inside vehicles must be securely stowed and not create a risk of injury or damage.
- Students must be supervised by a minimum of one adult, in addition to the driver, during travel.

Drivers of vehicles with more than 12 seats (including the driver) require an appropriately endorsed license, and a current Driver's Certificate.

For trips that take the bus beyond a 100km radius from its designated base, drivers must carry and complete a logbook, and comply with [National Driving Hours Regulations](#) and complete and record the [Daily Vehicle Check](#) (pdf file) before the first use each day.

In circumstances where a teacher or staff member is to drive a vehicle transporting students, the program should allow for that staff member to have adequate rest prior to driving, consistent with the National Driving Hours regulations. That is especially the case where the swimming activity includes an overnight component.

Where swimming activities require the transporting of students to the site by boat, all craft must comply with the minimum safety equipment listed in the [Marine Safety Victoria](#) Victorian Boating Guide.

Activity

Student skills

The preparation of students to be safe recreational swimmers will vary according to their age, ability and experience, the venue used, and the nature of the proposed swimming activity.

For Type 1 venues

Students must be given directions about safe swimming, appropriate boundaries, standards of behaviour and emergency procedures relevant to the particular venue.

For Type 2 venues

In addition to the skills required for Type 1 venues, students taking part in recreational swimming activities in open water must also be able to competently demonstrate the following skills:

- a jump entry
- survival sculling, floating and treading water for five minutes, followed by a slow swim for five minutes
- feet-first and head-first surface entry
- floating for one minute using a flotation aid, then swimming continuously and efficiently for 200 metres using one or more recognised strokes.

For Type 3 venues

In addition to the skills required for Type 1 venues, students must also be able to swim 200 metres and demonstrate basic swimming and water safety skills in flat water, including demonstrating:

- for one minute, using a flotation aid as a support
- reassuring any other swimmers by talking with them
- survival sculling, floating or treading water for a total of five minutes
- waving one arm as if signalling for help.

In surf environments, students must know surf swimming techniques, such as swimming through waves and body surfing. Emphasis should be placed on teaching about the changing nature of the sea bed and the dangers associated with diving under waves in willow water.

Before entering the water, students must understand:

- How to identify a rip, how water moves in a rip, and how to swim if caught in one. At a specific surf beach, students should be able to point out any rips and other hazards, such as rocks, and be able to indicate the safe areas and where they would swim to if caught in a rip.
- Safety procedures and considerations for the particular venue, including the boundaries of the surfing area depicted by clearly seen flags or landmarks on the shore.
- Surf signals (for example, one arm raised on the shore to indicate that all students must come out of the water, and for a surfer in trouble, one arm raised to signal for help) and the need to watch carefully for signals at all times.
- In a flowing river environment, students must understand; relevant river features, dangers of foot entrapments, strainers, sieves, the power of flowing water. Students must have been trained in rescue techniques before swimming in a flowing river environment.

Equipment and clothing

Equipment must be in a safe condition and suitable for the activity.

- Staff members must wear clearly identifiable clothing so they can be easily located.
- Each staff member must carry a whistle or other device for signalling swimmers and other staff.
- Identification and provision of any additional rescue aids for reaching and throwing, (for example, flotation aids, poles and ropes, surfboards), that need to be available during the activity, will be made after an assessment of the swimming venue (venue type, water conditions, rescue equipment on site) and the ability of the swimmers

First aid kits

First aid kits appropriate to the location and level of training must be carried.

Clothing

Clothing is the individual's primary protection against severe and variable weather conditions.

Clothing lists need to be appropriate for the activity, the environment and the season.

To protect against [sunburn](#) use broad-spectrum, water-resistant SPF 30+ sunscreen on all exposed parts of the body, applied according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Students who own sunglasses should be encouraged to bring them and wear them.

Identification

Staff and students must be easily identifiable.

Staff must determine the most suitable system(s) of identification, based on assessment of the environment, students' skills, the type of activities to be undertaken, and the age and number of students.

People

Staff

Staff members are those adults who provide the supervisory, instructional and educational elements of the program. All staff members must be approved by the school council.

All staff members who are not registered teachers must comply with the [Working with Children Check](#).

A teacher registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and either employed by the Department of Education or endorsed by the school council must be present and have overall responsibility for the activity.

Where not directly responsible for the instruction of the activity or assisting the instructor, teachers present must understand the activity and the environment in which it will be conducted. Teachers must confer with the designated instructor about their supervisory role and establish areas of responsibility. If a teacher is not the designated instructor he/she is to act on the advice of the designated instructor on technical safety issues.

Any staff members with a known medical condition that might compromise the group's risk management plan should make accompanying staff aware of this condition. Be aware that issues of confidentiality will be involved in any such disclosure.

Experience and qualifications

Staff involved in the planning and conduct of the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all foreseeable conditions.

For Type 1 Venues

The designated recreational swimming supervisor must hold one of the following:

- AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety Certificate, or
- Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) of Australia, or
- Pool Life Guard from Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) of Australia, or
- Bronze Medallion of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA), or
- Surf Rescue Certificate (SLSAA), or
- Recognised Australian White Water Rescue Training.

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

- have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
- be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
- have the ability to participate competently in emergency response procedures, including CPR.
- have conferred with the instructor to establish the emergency response and supervision responsibilities.

For Type 2 Venues

The designated recreational swimming supervisor must hold one of the following:

- Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) of Australia, or
- Bronze Medallion of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA), or
- Pool Life Guard from Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) of Australia, or
- Surf Rescue Certificate (SLSAA), or
- Recognised Australian White Water Rescue Training.

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

- have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
- be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
- have the ability to participate competently in emergency response procedures, including CPR.
- have conferred with the instructor to establish the emergency response and supervision responsibilities.

For Type 3 Venues

The designated recreational swimming supervisor must hold one of the following:

- Bronze Medallion of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA), or
- Surf Rescue Certificate (SLSAA), or
- Recognised Australian White Water Rescue (Non surf environments).

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

- have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
- be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
- have the ability to participate competently in emergency response procedures, including CPR.
- have conferred with the instructor to establish the emergency response and supervision responsibilities.

Where more than two staff members are required to supervise recreational swimming at least one assistant included in the ratios must hold one of the following:

- Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) of Australia, or
- Bronze Medallion of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA), or
- Surf Rescue Certificate (SLSAA) or
- Recognised Australian White Water Rescue training.

Supervision

Effective supervision is a critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one with responsibility for activity instruction and the other able to assist the instructor.

The following table shows the minimum staff to student ratio for recreational swimming. It should be applied when establishing the instructional and supervision strategy for the activity.

Activity	Staff required	Student numbers
Type 1 and Type 2 Venues	2	1-20
	3	21-30
Type 3 Venue	2	1-10

If the group is to exceed 20 students, to determine staffing levels the teacher-in-charge must consult other participating staff members about their ability to supervise and respond to an emergency with the larger group of students and adjust staffing accordingly.

The determination of staff numbers and suitability should be based on:

- age, maturity and gender of students
- ability and experience of students
- individual needs
- group dynamics of the student group
- experience, qualifications and skills of staff
- location of the activity
- anticipated conditions at the location.

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school council as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members will supervise students according to that strategy.

Lifeguards at pools and beaches can only be used for supervision and counted in staff–student ratios if their sole responsibility during the activity is for the students in the program.

However, in situations where a rescue is necessary, it would normally be expected that the duty lifeguards would take charge of the rescue. In situations where the duty lifeguards are otherwise occupied, the staff member(s) would undertake the rescue.

To ensure that there is no confusion between the roles of duty lifeguards and excursion staff members, the teacher in charge or nominated staff member must consult the relevant lifeguard on arrival at the venue.

The above are the minimum requirements for staff-student ratios for this activity.

Overnight excursions

If the program has an overnight component, refer to overnight guidelines.

Informed consent

The school must receive informed consent from parents or guardians that their child may participate in adventure activities.

Informed consent should be based on an understanding of:

- the educational purpose of the activity
- the nature and details of the activity
- the supervision strategy
- other information deemed relevant by the school or by parents/guardians.

Informed consent must be given in writing and signed by parents or guardians

First aid

At least one member of staff responsible for each group of students must hold, as a minimum, a Level Two First Aid qualification, and have a first aid kit applicable to the level of training.

Staff members must consider carefully the nature and location of the excursion as well as the medical history of the students to determine the level of first aid training required by staff.

Definitions

Please note, where conditions change, a location that was previously considered a Type 1 venue could become a Type 2 or 3 venues. The same is true for Type 2 venues.

Venue Type 1:

Type 1 venues include municipal and commercial swimming pools and willow, calm, confined swimming areas at natural venues such as lakes, dams and non-surf beaches. A willow, natural-water venue is defined as a venue where the maximum depth of the water is no greater than shoulder height for any of the students involved in the program. The water in Type 1 venues is clear.

Venue Type 2:

Type 2 venues include deep and/or flowing water at non-surf beaches, lakes, channels, rivers and dams. The water in Type 2 venues is clear.

Venue Type 3:

Type 3 venues include all beaches with direct access to ocean waters, any beach exposed to ocean swell, and any beach or lake that is exposed to currents, strong wind or large waves. Type 1 and 2 venues where the water is not clear.

Foot Entrapment – In moving water a foot entrapment may occur when a person washing downstream attempts to stand. This may result in the person's foot

jamming under a submerged object. The force of the water may then force the swimmer's body downstream and lodging midstream.

Sieves – A random arrangement of midstream objects, usually rocks, that allows the flow of water but hampers the movement of solid objects.

Strainers – These are usually created by trees that hang over or are in the flowing water, potentially blocking the movement of solid objects – people or craft - but allowing the flow of water.

Common Risks in Recreational Swimming

This list identifies risks inherent in any Recreational Swimming activity. A program-specific risk management plan must be completed which takes account of the specific conditions and unique participants of the excursion/program.

Risk	Minimum controls
<p>Student gets into difficulty due to rips, currents, tides, big or strong waves.</p>	<p>At least one member of staff to be familiar with local conditions.</p> <p>Pre-session briefing of students to identify these hazards before students enter water, and to outline essential safe practices for the particular venue.</p>
<p>Student tired and struggling to swim</p>	<p>Prior to swimming activity, staff will properly determine swimming ability of each student and ensure this matches proposed activity.</p> <p>Rescue aids appropriate for the venue and the abilities of the students need to be located close to the activity areas.</p> <p>Pre-activity briefing of students to clearly outline how to use relevant swimming aids and other equipment safely, particularly in moving water.</p> <p>Pre-session explanation to all students that one arm raised is a signal for help.</p> <p>The maximum number of students in the water at one time to be based on the number of appropriately qualified staff, and an assessment of current conditions and their impact on effective supervision.</p>
<p>Ineffective communication with the group during the</p>	<p>Staff to wear brightly coloured vest or other identifiable clothing so they can be easily located.</p>

<p>activity</p>	<p>Staff members to carry a whistle or other device for signalling to swimmers and other staff.</p> <p>Pre-session safety briefing to describe the signal for students to leave the water and boundaries of the defined swimming area.</p>
<p>Mismatch between depth and condition of the water and skills of students</p>	<p>Student preparation and experience must be appropriate to the venue chosen.</p> <p>Assessment of prevailing conditions to be made before students enter water to ensure that student skills and staff ability to conduct a rescue are appropriate.</p> <p>Arrangements to be sufficiently flexible that when weather changes lead to water conditions becoming more challenging, activities can be transferred to another venue, or a plan can be implemented to make groups smaller and more manageable for supervision, or the activity cancelled.</p>
<p>Staff fail to define the swimming area adequately and student/s move/s to an unsafe area for example, deep hole, fast flowing current, sharp rocks.</p>	<p>Pre-activity briefing of students to clearly define the swimming area.</p> <p><u>For Type 1 and 2 venues</u>, the swimming area to be clearly defined and identified by obvious limits such as the shoreline, piers, jetties or floating ropes. Small boats, rafts or floating platforms may be placed strategically for added safety as appropriate.</p> <p><u>For Type 3 venues</u>, the boundaries of the surfing area to be depicted by clearly seen flags or landmarks on the shore. In non surf environments, river banks, markers or other identifying features must be used.</p> <p>An effective communication strategy such as a whistle must also be in place.</p> <p>Out-of-water waiting area should be clearly defined</p>
<p>A student suffers neck or back injury by diving into water and hitting a submerged log, rocks or sandbar</p>	<p>At least one member of staff to be familiar with local conditions.</p> <p>Staff to assess presence of local hazards which may include a physical check. Staff must be aware of potential for spinal injury and very carefully assess the appropriateness of any diving activity.</p>

	<p>Use of recreational swinging ropes in natural swimming venues is not recommended.</p> <p>Pre-session briefing of students to identify hazards before students enter water, and to outline essential safe practices for the particular venue.</p>
<p>During the swim session a student or staff member suffers a soft tissue or skeletal injury.</p>	<p>During the pre activity planning, staff will consider student skills and experience and ensure walk route is suitable. This consideration will also identify strategies to support students with known weaknesses to reduce risk of injury.</p> <p>Clothing and equipment lists will be provided and will reflect the nature of the swimming location and season.</p> <p>Depending upon local conditions, footwear suitable for swimming maybe indicated. This would allow foot protection from sharp rocks, sticks or rubbish.</p> <p>During pre-activity planning, staff will develop an emergency response strategy. This strategy will consider possible responses should a group member require outside or medical assistance.</p>
<p>Student or staff member suffers an illness during the swimming session.</p>	<p>Pre-activity planning will include options to allow for an illness, slowed or delayed session.</p> <p>Prior to activity, staff will collect current and confidential medical information for each student which will be used to determine whether the activity matches each student's health status. Where possible the activity should be adapted to include every student.</p> <p>At start of excursion, staff will ensure there is no new illness that may have an effect on the ability of a student to participate. Consideration should also be given to whether that illness might spread to others in the group. Staff should be aware illness may affect energy levels and ability to with cope with the activity.</p> <p>Staff will carry current and confidential medical details for each student.</p> <p>Staff must ensure food storage practices allow for the safe provision of food. Additionally staff will be very clear on any food allergies amongst the group.</p> <p>Staff will ensure safe water sources are available for</p>

	<p>the group. It may be necessary to refer to local land managers to determine sources of safe water. It is recommended that students do not share water bottles, cutlery and cups to reduce risk of cross infection.</p> <p>During pre-activity planning, staff will develop emergency response strategy. This strategy will consider actions should a group member require outside or medical assistance.</p> <p>Contingency plan in place to access replacement staff member (Something like this comment should be added to each activity table, and injury control above, given that the risk includes staff illness and injury</p>
<p>A student or staff member develops hyperthermia.</p>	<p>If the swimming venue does not have areas with shade or wind shelter, temporary shelter or shorter swimming sessions to be considered.</p> <p>The provision of drinking water particularly on hot days to be included in planning.</p> <p>Students' level of fatigue and water intake to be monitored.</p> <p>Students to have appropriate sun protection clothing available when leaving the water.</p>
<p>A student or staff member develops hypothermia.</p>	<p>If the swimming venue does not have areas with wind or rain shelter, temporary shelter or shorter swimming sessions to be considered.</p> <p>Pre-activity briefing of students to clearly outline the procedures of what to do when feeling tired or cold.</p> <p>Students level of fatigue and temperature to be monitored.</p> <p>Use of wet suits to be considered, especially in very cold water.</p> <p>Students to have appropriate warm clothing for use when leaving the water.</p>
<p>An extreme weather event, including lightning, wind, flood, rain and heatwave threatens or takes place, endangering</p>	<p>Pre-activity planning will consider strategies should an extreme weather events take place. This will include options ranging from adjustment of activity through to complete cancellation and evacuation from the area.</p> <p>Staff should examine resources describing recommended responses to extreme weather. Refer to</p>

safety of the group.	<p>the Education Outdoors website which contains information regarding extreme weather events and links.</p> <p>Communications strategy will include a mechanism for group to be informed of severe weather warnings.</p>
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Downloads and Weblinks

Documents downloadable from this site (in PDF or Word)

[Approval Pro Forma for Adventure Activities and/or Overnight Excursions](#)

[Overnight Camping guidelines](#)

[Canoeing guidelines](#)

[Confidential Medical Information](#)

[The Crux of Risk Management in Outdoor Programs](#)

[Proforma: Documentation of Participant Preparation Pre-requisite Skills/Knowledge](#)

[Pro Forma Staff Qualifications/Experience](#)

External weblinks

Australian Canoeing
<http://www.canoe.org.au>

Australian Canoeing – Risk Management
http://www.canoe.org.au/default.asp?MenuID=Education/99/7292,Risk_Management/196/5275

Bureau of Meteorology
<http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/vic>

Country Fire Authority
<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au>

Daily Vehicle Check
<http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au>

Department of Sustainability and Environment
<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>

First aid information
<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/pdf/4-5.pdf>

Life Saving Victoria
<http://www.lifesavingvictoria.com.au>

Marine Safety Victoria
<http://www.marinesafety.vic.gov.au/>

National Driving Hours Regulations
<http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au>

Outdoor Recreation Centre
<http://www.orc.org.au>

River levels
http://www.bom.gov.au/hydro/flood/vic/rain_river.shtml

Parks Victoria
<http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au>

Royal Life Saving Society Australia Bronze Rescue Program
<http://www.bronzerescue.com.au>

State Emergency Service
<http://www.ses.vic.gov.au>

Student care and supervision
<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/pdf/4-6.pdf>

Student safety and risk management
<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/referenceguide/pdf/4-4.pdf>

SunSmart
<http://www.sunsmart.org.au>

Surf Life Saving Victoria
<http://www.lifesaving.vic.gov.au>

VicRoads
<http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au>

Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide
<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/referenceguide>