

OFFICIAL POSITION



Date: September 28th 2009

To: Safety supervisors, lifeguards, affiliate members

Subject: Accepted swimwear in accordance with safety and hygiene

Background

The persons responsible for aquatic facilities¹ have expressed concerns related to user safety, water quality and swimwear.

As we have to take into consideration bather safety and a lifeguard's ability to perform a rescue in the event of emergency, we hereby put forward and make observations on standards related to safety and hygiene established by some reputable organizations.

Persons responsible for aquatic facilities and affiliate members must therefore establish specific rules for their own facility regarding swimwear, taking into account the risks related to bathing, rescue procedures and pool water quality. (1)

Issues regarding swimwear should be thoughtfully handled. Rules concerning swimwear must be such that they facilitate access to participation in aquatic activities, since participating in swimming is recognized as an effective way to prevent drowning.

Justification

Some type of clothing may represent a drowning hazard. Lifeguards must make a judgment call based on safety or hygiene concerns, and must restrict access to bathing if the swimwear in question presents a drowning risk.

Swimwear must be suitable for the type of aquatic activity and the bather's swimming skills. Because wet clothing is heavier or effect of water resistance caused by clothing wideness, some swimwear can interfere with swimming skills and increase drowning risk for the bather as well as other bathers, and the lifeguard.

Even though there is no scientific evidence that links swimwear to a risk of Recreational Water Illnesses (RWIs) or water turbidity problems, we recommend the implementation of rules adapted to the aquatic facility and its water quality management procedures. We must recognize that bathers are the main contributors to water contamination (5). Dirty clothes could affect water treatment procedures because they contain organic matter and contaminants at the source of infectious diseases. Swimwear should be clean, as dirty clothing reduces the effectiveness of pool water treatment procedures. For this reason, bathers must take a shower using soap before entering an indoor pool, and only a shower before entering an outdoor pool.

¹ *The persons responsible for aquatic facilities means the owner or operator of a swimming pool.*

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on standards suggested by reputable organizations, with comments by Lifesaving Society, and are aimed at preventing drowning and other risks related to hygiene.

- The swimwear (swimsuit, cap and goggles) of all participants shall be in good moral taste and suitable for the individual sports disciplines, and not to carry any symbol which may be considered offensive to public order or democratic values (e.g. without discrimination, nudity forbidden). (Inspired by FINA regulation, GR 5.1 and 5.2).

Lifesaving Society's observation

Lifesaving Society is endorsing this FINA rule for bathing in a public pool. All swimwear must be suitable for general participation in bathing and must not impair swimming skills. Swimwear may be made of different types of fabric as long as it does not put a user's health at risk or interfere with pool water quality.

Appropriate swimwear is made of tight-fitting fabric that allows the body to move freely, does not impede buoyancy and does not create an increased risk to the bather's safety. The swimwear is clean, reserved exclusively for bathing and is ideally made of fabric that does not disintegrate in water.

In the case of patrons, who for personal reasons cannot expose a part of their body, a modified version of traditional swimwear must be permissible as an alternative. For example, acceptable alternative swimwear could include footless tights, gymnastic leggings, tight-fitting undershirt, a tight-fitting hood that covers the head and neck with wide openings for the face and ears, tight-fitting sweater or pants, or a wetsuit.

Burkinis and rash guards are examples of acceptable alternative swimwear as face and neck are uncovered and fabric is tight-fitting enough to do not interfere with swimming skills. Hands and feet can move freely and there is an additional element of hygiene if hair is covered.

Loose-fitting clothing or clothing made of absorbent fabrics are examples of unacceptable swimwear. This type of clothing diminishes the bather's swimming skills and constitutes a hazard. Accessories, such as a dress, a scarf, or a cape are also unacceptable because they can present a hazard by creating blind spots for lifeguards or interfering with the movement of other swimmers. Clothing made of disintegrating fabrics interfere with water treatment systems and are therefore unacceptable as are any other outfits that present a safety or hygiene concern.

As a benefit, swimwear that covers the whole body could result in a reduced use of sunscreen. This would further reduce contaminants in outdoor pools and contribute to improved water quality.

However, it is important to note that swimwear not accepted for open swim activity may be authorized for specific supervised activities. In these cases, the person responsible for the aquatic facility must apply special safety measures, such as a higher number of safety supervisors or a limited number of bathers in the pool. In addition, a specific area in the pool must be assigned for that purpose (1).

Wearing a swim cap, especially for bathers with long hair, reduces the risk of getting hair trapped in drains or filters. Furthermore, swim caps are likely to have a positive effect on water treatment systems. It is the responsibility of swimming pool operators or owners to decide whether swim caps are compulsory for aquatic activities.

- ...if an operator is lending or renting towels or bathing suits to users, they must be washed and sanitized with a disinfectant solution after each use. Towels and bathing suits should ideally be the same colour (preferably white)...; (*Guide d'exploitation des piscines et autres bassins artificiels*)

Lifesaving Society's observation

Lifesaving Society is endorsing this recommendation for bathing in public pools. We also recommend using this rule for the lending of swim caps (5). At no time shall the safety supervisor on duty be responsible for renting swimwear, towels or swim caps as this would be an intrusion on lifeguarding duty contributing to drowning hazard.

- Requirement to take a shower with soap before and after bathing and to completely rinse off each time; (*Guide d'exploitation des piscines et autres bassins artificiels*)

Lifesaving Society's observation

Lifesaving Society is endorsing this recommendation for bathing in public pools.

The *Institut national de santé publique du Québec* has adopted the position to promote taking a shower with soap and water and rinsing off prior to swimming in indoor pools. Furthermore, in the case of outdoor pools, we must promote the habit of showering without soap notably to rinse off and remove any surplus sunscreen (Lévesque and Rainds 2007). Swimwear should not in any way diminish the effectiveness of the shower.

- ...to prevent the spread of germs, patrons cannot wear outdoor shoes in areas where bathers walk barefoot.
As a result, it is important to provide an access route that ensures that patrons wearing outdoor shoes and going to barefoot areas do not return the same way, except when leaving the facility. In the event that attendants must go into a barefoot area, they should be provided with disposable shoe covers or be required to remove their shoes to avoid contaminating the area. (*Guide d'exploitation des piscines et autres bassins artificiels*)

Lifesaving Society's observation

Lifesaving Society endorses this recommendation for bathing in public pools. This rule should apply to pool patrons and could also be applied in other areas of the facility. Measures could also be taken to ensure that changing rooms are kept clean to reduce contaminants being carried into the pool area by patrons.

For the same reasons, clothing worn outside the pool area should not be allowed for bathing in the pool.

References:

1. *Alert! Lifeguarding in action* (Lifesaving Society, 1993)
2. *Baignade saine, Prévention de maladies infectieuses transmises par les eaux de baignade (MTEB), Questions et réponses à l'attention des baigneuses et baigneurs* (Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec, 2007)
3. Fédération internationale de natation, *General regulation*
4. *Guide d'exploitation des piscines et autres bassins artificiels destinés à la baignade* (Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs, 2006).
5. *L'utilisation d'écrans solaires et la fréquentation des piscines publiques* (Lévesque et Rhainds, INSPQ, avril 2007)
6. *Pratiques municipales de gestion de la diversité ethnoreligieuse à Montréal: le cas des piscines publiques* (Billette, INRS, 2005)

Every Lifesaving Society's OFFICIAL POSITION must be put to use by all certified members (Bronze Medallion, Bronze Cross, National Lifeguard, Instructor, etc.) and its affiliate members, as soon as it is made public.

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The Lifesaving Society is a charitable organization whose mission is the preservation of human life and to offer help to victims of water-related traumas.
