

New York State Children's Camps Fact Sheet

Swimming Requirements

June 2015

Introduction

Children's camps offering swimming (bathing) at on-site or off-site locations must meet the requirements of Section 7-2.11(a) of [Subpart 7-2 of the State Sanitary Code](#) (SSC). Except for wilderness sites (remote beach site which is established for temporary use at a location that is not readily accessible for inspection by the permit-issuing official), only those swimming pools and bathing beaches in New York State (NYS) that have a valid permit to operate issued from the [local health department](#) having jurisdiction for the bathing facility, or those operated by a NYS agency, may be used. Residential swimming pool use is prohibited.

For guidance on camper swimming at wilderness sites, see the department guidance document titled "[Children's Camp Program Wilderness Swimming Guidance](#)."

Information

The following are required minimum components of a camp aquatics safety program which must be addressed in the camp's written safety plan, camper and staff training programs, and implemented:

- **Camper Swimming Ability Assessment** - At a minimum, a camper's swimming ability must be categorized as non-swimmer or swimmer. In order to be categorized as a swimmer and allowed to enter water greater than chest deep, a swimming ability assessment must be conducted by a [Progressive Swimming Instructor](#), as defined in [Subdivision 7-2.5\(f\) of Subpart 7-2 of the SSC](#). Campers that are not assessed by a Progressive Swimming Instructor may be treated as non-swimmers and restricted to water less than chest deep except as noted below.
- **Campers Confined to a Swimming Area Appropriate to their Ability** - The permanent swimming area must be divided into at least non-swimmer and swimmer areas.
 - Campers must be confined to the area appropriate to their assessed swimming ability. This may be done by a float line, dock, or staff positioned at a depth that corresponds to the shortest camper's chest height.
 - Non-swimmers must be conspicuously identified to be readily distinguishable from swimmers except where non-swimmers are restricted from entering the swimmer area by a physical barrier such as a swim crib or dock, or are in a separate pool only for non-swimmers (A float line is not considered a physical barrier).
 - ◆ Methods to visually identify non-swimmers include bathing caps, wrist or headbands, t-shirts, and colored zinc-oxide sun block. Use different colored

visual identifiers for non-swimmers and swimmers or identify swimmers only. If only non-swimmers are visually identified they may be able to easily remove the identifier and enter the swimmer area unnoticed. The mechanism the camp selects must be included in their written safety plan.

- Non-swimmers must be restricted to water less than chest deep, except:
 - ◆ during [learn-to swim-programs approved by the NYS Department of Health](#); or
 - ◆ when counselors are in the water and directly supervise a maximum of three non-swimmers in shallow water in the non-swimmer area.

Non-swimmers in greater than chest deep water has been identified as a major contributing factor in drownings involving non-swimmers. Bathers become buoyant in water chest deep and above, causing them to lose contact with the pool/beach bottom. When this occurs, campers may not be able to prevent themselves from entering deeper water beyond their ability.

- **"Buddy System" and Method of Accounting for Bathers** - The camp must describe the surveillance method they implement to account for bathers in their approved written safety plan. The method must include the following components:
 - A Buddy System and Board System of supervising and checking bathers. This system may be maintained on a stationary (conventional) "buddy board," hand held "clip board," or other method approved in the camp's written safety plan, and include, as a minimum:
 - ◆ an accounting system which identifies each bather by name, the bather's swimming ability and the swim area to which the bather is assigned;
 - ◆ a method of recording the entry to and exit from the swim area for each bather;
 - ◆ the assignment of each bather to a buddy who must have the same level of swimming ability. If a non-swimmer is paired with a swimmer, both must remain in the non-swimmer area. One threesome is allowed per swim area. Buddies shall be instructed to notify the lifeguard when their partner is in distress or is missing; and
 - ◆ that checks of the bathers are made at least every 15 minutes. These checks must be referenced against the accounting system. An effective and quick method for staff to conduct a buddy check is for staff to count the number of buddy pairs in each section and verify the count with the staff maintaining the board/accounting system. If the count doesn't match, count pairs again and if the count still doesn't match, initiate the lost swimmer plan.

- **Bather Surveillance** - *Constant visual surveillance of the swimming area must be maintained.* Lifeguards and counselors must be trained regarding their responsibilities at the camp waterfront.

On-Site Swimming Programs:

- One [qualified lifeguard](#) is required for every 25 bathers and each lifeguard may supervise no more than 3,400 square feet of pool surface area or 50 yards of shoreline at a bathing beach.
- Counselors should be assigned to supervise specific children. The ratio of counselors to campers participating in activities in the water is 1:10 for children eight and older; 1:8 for children six and seven years old; and 1:6 for campers under six years of age.

Camp Trip Swimming Programs:

- Camp trips to a facility where qualified lifeguards are provided, the camp must provide one qualified camp lifeguard or camp staff who possesses training in children's camp swimming program safety, for each 75 campers to supervise camper bathing activities and implement the camp safety plan. A camp supplied lifeguard, or staff trained in children's camp swimming program safety, is not required for aquatic amusement park activities that allow only one or two patrons in the water at a time and the activity water depth does not exceed chest deep for non-swimmers.
 - Camp trips to a facility where qualified lifeguards are **not** provided, the camp must provide, with permission of the facility, one qualified lifeguard for every 25 bathers and each lifeguard may supervise no more than 3,400 square feet of pool surface area or 50 yards of shoreline at a bathing beach.
 - Counselors should be assigned to supervise specific children. The ratio of counselors to campers participating in off-site swimming is 1:8 for campers six and older; and 1:6 for campers under six years of age.
- **Lost Swimmer Plan** - Whenever a "buddy check" fails to account for the whereabouts of a bather or anytime a bather is reported missing, a lost swimmer plan must be implemented. This written safety plan component must include clearing the water, supervising other campers present at the waterfront and searching for the missing bather(s).

Supplemental Information

1. The camp's **on-site** swimming program must be directly supervised by the camp's Aquatic Director. The [Camp Aquatics Director](#) must be qualified as described in subdivision 7-2.5(e) of Subpart 7-2 of the SSC. When qualified as a [Progressive Swimming Instructor](#), the Camp Aquatics Director can assess camper swimming ability. When certified as a qualified lifeguard, the Camp Aquatics Director may perform lifeguard duties.
2. Children's camp lifeguards must meet the qualifications found in subdivision 7-2.5(g) of

Subpart 7-2 of the SSC. Lifeguards must meet lifeguarding, first aid and CPR requirements (see Department [fact sheets](#) for acceptable certifications) and be at least 17 years-of-age. A maximum of 50% of the required total number of lifeguards on duty may be 16 years-of-age.

3. When swimming is conducted during camp trips, including at aquatic amusement parks and wilderness swimming sites, each camper must have a signed statement of permission to participate from a parent/guardian. The permission statement should be provided for each trip and list the date(s) or frequency (e.g. daily, every Monday), location(s), and a brief description of the swimming activities to take place.
4. A written safety plan template for on-site and off-site swimming activities is available from your [local health department](#).