



COVID-19 GUIDANCE TO OPEN WATER VENUES

(Version 6: 19 March 2021)

FOR ENGLAND AND WALES ONLY

IN ASSOCIATION WITH





SH₂OUT INTRODUCTION

SH₂OUT is a partnership between British Triathlon, Swim England and RLSS UK, which has been developed to promote and progress open water swimming and safety within the sport. The partnership aims to provide appropriate resources and support the standards that ensure safe and compelling experiences for open water swimming participants.

This guidance has been developed through collaboration and input of all three organisations, with the aim of giving open water venues guidance on how to approach open water swimming in the current climate.

If you have any questions or require any support regarding your venue and open water swimming, please contact us at info@sh2out.org

VENUE GUIDANCE

Based on the latest government instruction on Coronavirus/Covid-19 as outlined in the government's **Covid-19 Response - Spring 2021** (applicable in England), and Wales' **Coronavirus Control Plan: Alert Levels in Wales**, SH₂OUT will follow a range of adjustments in line with the latest government instruction across England, Scotland, and Wales. For the latest English government guidance please see <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> For the latest Welsh government guidance please see <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>.

For venues in England, we are awaiting greater clarity from Government on the detailed implications of the Roadmap published on 22 February 2021. This is not expected until week commencing 22 March 2021. We appreciate this is uncomfortably close to the next milestone in the Roadmap (29 March) and so we have published this guidance to support venue operators to prepare for the next Step. This guidance is based on our assessment of what will be and won't be permissible from 29 March and we remind the reader that the contents of this guidance are subject to change. SH₂OUT publishes this guidance in good faith and do not accept any liability for any actions or claims arising from it.

Where open water swimming is permitted by your government, you should ask yourself whether you think it is socially responsible to open your venue; due to the inherent dangers, increased risk and pressure that this may cause the NHS and emergency services.

Unless you can put all the measures that are outlined below in place AND comply with all relevant Government guidance, **we do not recommend that you should open your venue**. This guidance has been developed to be read alongside the government [Grassroots sports guidance for the public and sport providers](#) and in Wales - [Sport, recreation and leisure: guidance for a safe return](#).

If you are a venue that is interested in SH₂OUT Venue Accreditation for 2021, further information will be shared soon. Venue operators are required to consider additional Covid-19 requirements for their venues as part of SH₂OUT accreditation. You can sign up to receive the SH₂OUT Organised Open Water Swimming Manual (for free) by completing the [Venue Accreditation Enrolment Form](#).

If you are a venue that is remaining opening during the winter and offering open water swimming provision at temperatures below 11°C, please ensure you have read the SH₂OUT Recreational Winter Swimming Guidance. To request a copy of this please email [SH₂OUT](#).

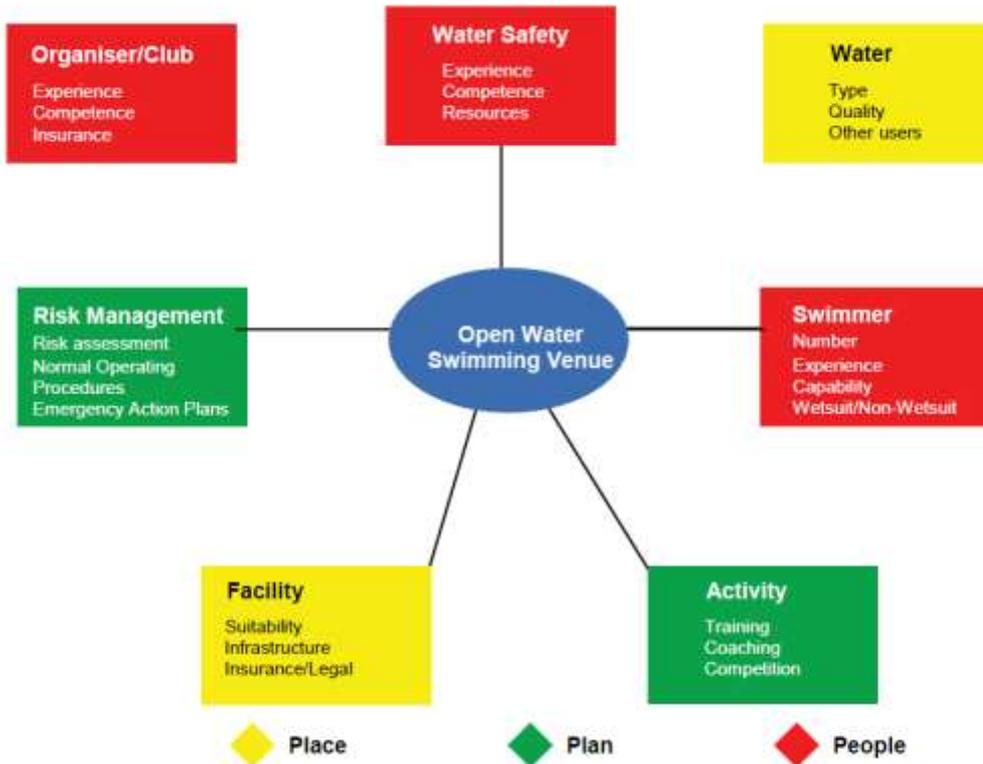


Risk Management

The risk factors for open water swimming fall into three broad areas:

- Places - covering issues relating to the venue/environment and the type of water.
- Planning - covering the type of activity and appropriate safety arrangements
- People - covering the people responsible for providing safety cover as well as the swimmers themselves.

These are illustrated below and provide a useful checklist of things to think about in terms of your venue's response to Covid-19 and the social distancing guidelines.



Pre-Swimming

Water Quality

Before you open your venue or any swimming takes place, you need to undertake your water quality testing. We are aware that many venues have not carried out water quality testing in 2020. For further guidance of water quality testing, please read page 14 in the SH₂OUT Guidance Document for Organised Open Water Swimming.

There are laboratories available to carry out testing of water samples and we can recommend <https://swim-safety.co.uk/> for your testing. Swim Safety offer a complete water quality sampling and results package. Although we are aware that the laboratories are open and available to carry out testing, we are aware that there are some issues with courier services and post. This may affect the time it takes to complete your water quality testing and has implications on planning, as you need to get your sample off to the laboratories in a certain timescale. As a result of this, please plan your testing carefully and seek advice from Swim Safety on application.

Documentation

You should review all your documentation prior to opening your venue to swimmers. This includes:

- Risk Assessment (either adapt your current assessment or develop a specific Covid-19 assessment that outlines the additional risks that Covid-19 poses and how you will mitigate these risks.) Remember as part of your “duty of care” organisers must “make suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks” to the people who are involved in or affected by your activity.
- Normal Operating Plan (NOP) - how will Covid-19 affect activity that is managed under normal (non-emergency) circumstances. This might include procedures for registering/queuing/briefing swimmers, counting swimmers into and out of the water, how you maintain social distancing for all, and how you will supervise swimmers in the water. How will you adjust each procedure to ensure social distancing and good hygiene is always in place?
- Emergency Action Plan (EAP) - describe how any foreseeable incidents will be managed and how you will maintain social distancing where at all possible during these emergencies. Potential incidents may include a missing swimmer, a panicking swimmer, an injured swimmer, an unconscious swimmer, and a course evacuation. We will go into each of these in more detail below.

Covid-19 Officer

All venues must appoint a named Covid-19 Officer (CO) for the venue. This person can be the venue owner, a member of staff, a volunteer or part of the water safety team. The CO should have overall responsibility for the delivery of the venues Covid-19 actions as part of the NOP/EAP and the Risk Assessment, including the risk and mitigation planning, communicating information to all parties and ensuring that the necessary standards are met. This individual does not have to be medically trained.

SH₂OUT have developed a Covid-19 Officer example role descriptor that that you can adjust for the venue. Please access this [here](#).

Insurance

The appropriate insurance must be in place to cover the people involved in delivering the activity and the swimmers. This will include:

- Public Liability Insurance
- Employers Liability Insurance

SH₂OUT does not provide insurance cover for activities organised by individuals or organisations. Venue owners and operators will need to confirm they have appropriate insurance in place to accommodate open water swimming.

Activities organised by clubs may be covered by the insurance of the organisation the club is affiliated to. If you are an affiliated club operating an open water venue, you must follow the guidance set by the affiliating organisation.

We advise that every venue owner or operator checks with their insurance provider to establish that their insurance cover is in place for delivering activity that is adapted to ensure social distancing can be maintained and for the potential for someone to contract coronavirus whilst swimming at the venue.

You should also ask your insurers advice regarding any pre-swim disclaimer or terms and conditions form that you plan to ask participants to complete. You may wish to include terms regarding Coronavirus. Some example questions that you may wish to ask the swimmer to answer/agree to are:

- Have you displayed symptoms of Covid-19?
- Have you come into contact with anyone displaying Covid-19 symptoms?
- Have you seen a doctor recently regarding Covid-19 symptoms?
- Do you agree to maintain social distancing at all times?
- Do you agree to maintain good hygiene prior to entry to the site and whilst on site?

However, please ensure you seek advice from your own insurance provider before sending out any disclaimers to your participants.

It is yet unclear what impact Covid-19 will have on the long-term health of those who contracted the virus. As a precaution, you should ask your participants to consider the following:

- If you were hospitalised due to Covid-19, you should undergo a form of health screening prior to taking part in open water swimming. This screening is best led by a doctor with specialist training in sports medicine. However other doctors may feel competent to make decisions on a swimmer's fitness to compete and to decide any appropriate investigations that might be required.
- If they were not hospitalised due to Covid-19 but self-isolated having shown symptoms at any time, they are also recommended to undergo a form of screening.
- If they have felt entirely well during the pandemic, they are not routinely recommended to undergo health screening, but it is something to be considered as part of your normal health monitoring for the health-conscious competitor.

The participant's GP should be able to guide them on what level of screening they may require, and who is the best person to assist them in the process.

Venues are not required to have evidence of competitors' pre-health screening. However, any requirements that you introduce in this area must be communicated to participants in advance of their swimming and prior booking where possible.

Booking Swimmers and Coached Sessions

It is recommended that you plan how many swimmers you think can be both onsite at your venue and how many can be swimming whilst complying with social distancing guidelines; where it is possible for swimmers, staff and the water safety team to keep 2 metres apart they should. Where it is not, everyone should keep a social distance of 'one metre plus', meaning they should remain one metre apart, while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission.

Once you have established your Covid-19 venue capacity, you should base your planning and preparation to ensure you stay within this capacity.

To achieve this, we recommend that venues operate a booking system - online, via email or telephone. This way you can manage the number of visitors to your venue and swimming whilst at your venue. Where possible stagger arrival and departure times to reduce crowding into and out of your venue. Where possible please offer pre-payment upon booking as this will minimise contact on site.

We recommend that you communicate via your social media, website statement and arrival signage that your venue is not operating a "turn up and swim" approach and that pre-booking is required.

By offering pre-booking, this provides the opportunity for you to ask that the participant agrees to your terms and conditions, signs a disclaimer, and provides their contact details. Where possible, we advise that you put this in place via the booking and therefore reduce required contact onsite at your venue.

You should also use this as an opportunity to communicate clearly and regularly with your participants, setting out what you are doing to mitigate risk, and what advice you are giving to swimmers to do likewise.

Sending out your swim briefing information prior to arrival and asking all participants to read this is also advised. This way you will only need to highlight the key safety information at the onsite briefing whilst maintaining social distancing.

All disclaimers and data must be securely stored in line with the relevant privacy policy and GDPR regulations. Venues must ensure that within their privacy policy it states that where requested to do so by the NHS Test and Trace service, participant information will be shared to aid the prevention of further spread of infection. Pre-swimming health questionnaires and swimmers contact information need to be kept for 21 days.

If you allow your venue to be used for coached sessions, you should be aware of and ensure the coach follows the coaching guidance as set by the governing body that qualified the coach.

British Triathlon Clubs and Coaches guidance can be found [here](#).

Swim England Clubs and Coaches guidance can be found [here](#).

RLSS UK Clubs and Lifeguard guidance can be found [here](#).

Car Parking and Signage

You may need to adjust your venue car parking layout to ensure that arriving participants can park safely whilst continuing to comply to social distancing guidelines.

We recommend that you separate staff parking from participant parking as this will help to protect your staff.

Where possible you should also provide additional facilities to help people walk, run or cycle to your venue where possible. If you are providing bike racking, ensure you can keep it sanitised and provide a hand sanitiser station nearby.

Use signage and floor markings where possible to direct participants so that social distancing guidelines can be maintained. Introduce one-way flow at entry and exit points.

Use signage such as ground markings or by being creative with objects to mark out 2 metres where possible. In England, where this is not possible, you should ensure everyone can keep a social distance of 'one metre plus', (meaning they should remain one metre apart while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission), to allow controlled flows of people moving throughout the site. Think about your flow from the moment a participant parks, to check in, to leaving valuables/changing outdoors, to swim entry, swim exit, back to changing outdoors, to check out and return to car park.

A good example of this is the use of arrows on the floor that supermarkets are using to control the flow of customers throughout the store whilst maintaining social distancing.

Change your layout to allow people to be on site, but to be further apart from each other than they usually would have been.



Check in and Briefing

Even though we recommend pre booking, we acknowledge there is still a requirement for participants to check in on arrival.

Where possible aim to reduce interaction and always ensure social distancing is maintained. Set up your check in area and mark out a 2 metre line (In England, where this is not possible, you should ensure everyone can keep a social distance of 'one metre plus', meaning they should remain one metre apart while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission) to allow participants to stand in order to verbally provide their name to you before you signpost them to their area to leave belongings and to prepare to swim.

We recommend all indoor facilities, apart from toilets and through-ways should be kept closed. This includes keeping indoor changing rooms closed.

Develop a queuing system (although queuing should be reduced due to staggered arrival times) that allows participants to queue at a safe distance of 2 metres apart. (In England, where this is not possible you should ensure everyone can keep a social distance of 'one metre plus', meaning they should remain one metre apart, while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission) again we recommend marking this out on the floor.



Where you do need to take payments on site, consider mandating contactless or at least card payment to avoid handling cash. If this isn't possible, we recommend that the check in staff member wears protective disposable gloves and that the participant places the money on the check in desk and moves back to the queueing line before the staff member collects the money and provides change if required. Again, where this can be avoided - it should be.

Think about how you will deliver your key safety messages in your swimmer briefing and ensure you maintain social distancing between staff and all swimmers.

Equipment

Swimmer equipment

When swimming in open water there is a need for an increased amount of personal equipment, we recommend that each participant uses their own equipment therefore venues should not have equipment for hire. This includes wetsuits, swimming hats, goggles, and tow floats. This is to reduce the risk of infection through the use of equipment that has not been sterilised.

Safety equipment

Each venue will have different equipment depending on individual operating procedures and emergency action plans. It is important for every piece of equipment to be cleaned thoroughly prior to and after use. This includes in between lifeguard/safety team rotations, there could be a need for a break in the swimming session to allow the teams to rotate whilst maintaining social distancing and clean their equipment.

Swim Course

When planning the swim course to adhere to social distancing rules each swimmer must remain 2m apart (In England, where this is not possible, they must be able to keep a social distance of 'one metre plus', meaning they should remain one metre apart, while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission.) in order to achieve this changes might need to be made to the swim course, the positioning of the safety team and the number of swimmers able to swim at any one time.

In the event of an incident occurring the safety team need to be able to get to the swimmer in difficulty within 1 minute and recover them to the side within 3 minutes.

If the swimming course is reduced in size the number of swimmers will also need to be reduced. It is important to think about the entry and exit points to the swim course to allow for effective social distancing, whilst allowing the safety team to check swimmers in and out of the water. You should continuously remind swimmers to remain 2 metres apart (in England, where this is not possible, you should remind swimmers to keep a social distance of 'one metre plus', meaning they should remain one metre apart) whilst they are swimming (as they may forget once active).

Catering for pool swimmers and novices

Currently, we recognise that people are keen to get out and about instead of sitting in their own homes. However, this must be tempered by everyone's responsibility not to put others at risk.

People who have never been open water swimming before, even ardent pool swimmers are likely to want to swim in your venue to get back into the sport they love. As a venue operator you need to be aware of this and make plans to avoid the additional risks this may pose. Particularly early in the season when the water temperature is still low, and people will not be acclimatised. It is recommended that

you should invite known and experienced swimmers to your venue only, you will then be aware of their ability, reducing the risk of an incident occurring where the safety team need to intervene.

Some actions you should consider and include in your risk assessment:

- Be clear to swimmers and your staff what your expectations of swimmers will be
- Decide how competent a swimmer must be before entering your venue. This could depend on their experience and should be in line with water temperatures.
- Decide how you are going to ask this question, preferably during the booking process. It is very disappointing to arrive ready to swim and then be turned away.
- Can you add this information to your online consent forms or your pre-swim information?
- How will you induct the new swimmer whilst following social distancing rules?
- If a swimmer arrives and has never swum in open water before deciding what actions you will take and do not be pressurised into allowing a swimmer to swim if you feel the risks are too great.
- Is your venue open to swimmers under the age of 18 - (if this is the case you should refer to the SH₂OUT Children and Young People, which you can request by emailing info@sh2out.org)

These individuals may not have the correct equipment or knowledge prior to taking up the activity. As mentioned in the Swimmer Equipment section of this document it is not advised that you hire out any equipment, all swimmers should aim to use their own equipment including wetsuit, hat, goggles, and tow float. This is in line with current government guidelines 'Where possible we recommend that you limit sharing of equipment.'

This is not the time for people new to open water to give it a go. You may be able to offer this service at a later date.

Whilst swimming

Venue staff and Water Safety team

RLSS UK are working with medical and water safety professionals to develop a set of guidelines to support you to safely protect your safety team from infection, if they need to perform a rescue. It is our recommendation that venues should wait for this advice before opening. For further information and support please visit <https://www.rlss.org.uk/guidance-for-open-water-swimming-operators-managing-lifeguards-during-covid-19>

The welfare of your safety team is just as important as the participants and therefore you need to put plans in place to protect your team as much as possible and to ensure continued compliance of social distancing guidelines.

Things to ask yourself prior to opening:

- How will your team and swimmers move around the venue and carry out their role whilst maintaining a distance of 2 metres (in England, where this is not possible, can they keep a social distance of ‘one metre plus’, meaning they should remain one metre apart, while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission.)
- What equipment do your team need to be able to do their job?
- How will the equipment be sanitised before and after use?
- What PPE equipment do you need for your staff and water safety team? You can find guidance about the use of PPE here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan>
- How will you provide clear, consistent, and regular communication to all staff on site to keep up to date with updated safety measures?
- How will you communicate the swimming process, swim course and where the safety team are located to your swimmers whilst maintaining social distancing?
- You must ensure frequent cleaning of equipment, objects, and surfaces.
- Provide additional hand washing and hand sanitiser facilities for staff and swimmers.

If any staff members or members of their household have symptoms in the last 10 days, they should not attend work and should self-isolate as in the government guidance.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Your ability to offer a safe and great experience as a venue, in terms of your ability to carry out your NOP and EAP is crucial. If there is any concern that you do not have enough staff in place to carry out your venue procedures as set out in your NOP, EAP and the guidance above, then your venue should remain closed.

Medical Support and Swimmer Recovery

All open water swimming activities should have plans to deal with incidents, these should be contained within your sites Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Basic First Aid support should be available as a minimum but where the risks increase e.g. with greater numbers of swimmers, increased swim distances or reduced water temperatures more extensive medical support should be considered.

In terms of water safety support, the locations of each member of the safety team should be planned so that they can maintain 2 meters social distancing (in England, where this is not possible, can they keep a social distance of ‘one metre plus’, meaning they should remain one metre apart, while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission) from swimmers and other members of the water safety team.

You should revisit your NOP and EAP to ensure that you have sufficient plans outlined for how you will react to the following scenarios, with Covid-19 and the governments social distancing measures in place.

Some high-level questions that you may wish to consider are:

- How will your safety team perform a rescue whilst maintaining social distancing measures?
- What changes do you need to make to your NOP and EAP to ensure sufficient safety for swimmers?
- What additional training does your team need to ensure they are up to speed on the new procedures and how will this be delivered?
- Where will your first aid area be?
- How will you ensure that your first aid area supports social distancing measures?
- Can swimmers with minor injuries independently make their way to land and be self-sufficient in applying first aid, if the kit is provided?
- Do you need to change your swimmer safety briefing to incorporate how your venue will deal with injuries?
- How will you recover swimmers with major injuries or unconscious swimmers to the shore whilst maintaining social distancing?
- Do you need to seek advice on this and how this affects your insurance cover?
- Can further recovery be done without physical contact?
- What PPE will your water safety team wear and require, ensuring they have adequate protection?
- If someone requires resuscitation, how will you deliver this?
- Do you have access to a defibrillator?

Visit <https://www.rlss.org.uk/pages/category/rlss-uk-guidance-for-operating-during-covid-19> for guidance to support you in your response to these high-level questions

If you are in doubt about your ability to provide a duty of care to your staff and swimmers, and to carry out any element of your EAP, **we recommend that you do not open your venue.**

Post Swim

Advice to Swimmers

It is recommended that you give swimmers advice after their swim which should include:

1) How to recover and reheat during colder temperatures or cool down if they have overheated during warm weather.

- Explain they need to dry off and dress immediately, put on warm clothes, including a hat and gloves to prevent suffering from the “after drop”, which is the lowering of the core temperature.
- Ask them to get into a sheltered spot - so they are protected from any wind or chill. Ideally this would be their car. Again, ensure they maintain social distancing when they have exited the water.
- Ask them to have a hot drink as soon as possible after swimming to help maintain their body temperature and re-stock with something sugary if they are low on energy. Before they eat or drink, they **MUST** wash hands using sterilising wipes or gels.

2) How to clean and decontaminate ALL equipment once they return to their homes including:

- Explain once they return home they must shower in fresh water at the earliest opportunity and again put on lots of warm clothes. This will remove all microbes, many of which are able to survive on the skin surface for long periods.
- Rinse and wash all their kit in fresh water before drying thoroughly - including wetsuit, goggles, tow float and swimming costume.
- If they feel ill to seek medical advice by calling 111 - including rashes for up to three weeks following their swim. Explain they need to highlight they have been swimming in open water and tell the operator the location that they swam in.

3) How to ensure they leave your venue as they found it including:

Ask them to take all their belongings and leave the location as they found it. Take any litter with them and dispose it when they are back at home which will reduce the risk of cross contamination for your staff.

Café/refreshments

If there is the capacity and resource to be in a position to serve food and drink, then hot and cold food may be served for consumption, we advise that this would be best consumed off site (i.e. in the swimmer’s car or off-site). For further guidance see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-grassroots-sports-guidance-for-the-public-and-sport-providers> in England and <https://gov.wales/sport-recreation-and-leisure-guidance-phased-return.html> in Wales.

Evaluate and Improve

It is essential to complete the risk assessment cycle and ensure you review your procedures after your first session. This will highlight any unsafe practices, areas where customers and staff could not comply with social distancing measures and allow yourselves to make further decisions. You must ask yourself if you can operate under the current guidance and can maintain everyone’s safety. Complete any changes to procedures this has highlighted, but if you cannot maintain safety you must ask yourself if your business should be open. Continue with the evaluation after each session to ensure there is no complacency in your processes.