

FÉDÉRATION  
INTERNATIONALE  
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# BACK TO WATER COVID-19 GUIDELINES



JULY 2020

## INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

These guidelines have been developed by the FINA COVID-19 Task Force to address a safe return to aquatic sport following COVID-19. They reflect information from the World Health Organization (WHO), FINA Member Federations and other international sport federations.

Given that FINA aquatic disciplines represent individual and team events, best practice for return to training and competition must be adapted accordingly. This document is designed to provide guidance only and stakeholders are reminded that the recommendations of their respective public health authorities must take precedence.

For medical doctors involved in aquatic sport, an excellent update *Recommendations for return to sport during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic*, has been published recently in the British Journal of Sports Medicine (ref: Lollgen H, Bachl N, Papadopoulou T, et al BMJ Open Sport and Exercise Medicine 2020;6:e000858 doi:10.1136/bmjsem-2020-00858).

**FINA understands that the international control of COVID-19 is proceeding at a variable rate and therefore no single set of guidelines will fit every situation.**

### 1. HEALTH MONITORING

Prior to a return to training, athletes, coaches, and associated staff must be free of any symptoms likely to have implications for COVID-19. These may include cough, shortness of breath, fever, muscle pain, headache, a sore throat, new loss of taste or smell or gastrointestinal illness. Any recent return from international travel and contact with known COVID-19 cases are additional factors that will also increase the risk of infection.

**If any of these criteria apply then you should consult your family doctor who will assess your need for COVID testing.**

## 2. POSITIVE TESTING & RESUMPTION OF TRAINING

Should you have a screening test that is positive for COVID-19, public health officials will assess and determine your particular requirements in accordance with local policy. Where there are implications for the safe operation of a public facility such as a swimming pool and associated group activities, initiatives will be instituted to manage COVID spread. In the context of swim squad or team activity, contact tracing becomes critical and may result in the immediate suspension of any further training.

Until medical clearance is received from the appropriate local health authority, any infected aquatic athlete or staff member will not be permitted to return to their sport community. In most countries this will demand managed isolation for 14-days, the absence of any relevant signs and symptoms and a subsequent negative test for COVID-19. Regulations governing isolation vary across the world and sometimes even within a country. Each aquatic athlete must comply with the advice of a physician, in accordance with accepted public health criteria, before returning to training after COVID-19 infection.

**The resumption of group aquatic activities will depend on factors determined by each local public health authority and include strict implications for general hygiene and physical distancing.**

## 3. REDUCING THE RISK OF SPREAD

It is widely understood that the spread of COVID-19 can be controlled through collective measures including physical distancing, strict hygiene and the diligent use of facemasks. However, there is no single set of binding rules that covers each of these measures and no internationally agreed regulation. In some countries the wearing of masks is mandated at all times, while in others this only applies to public transport or where an individual may have symptoms of respiratory infection or have a history of chronic health problems.

However, there is agreement that the COVID-19 virus survives on particular communal surfaces and is spread by droplets from coughing or sneezing. Consequently there is international acceptance of the principles of regular hand washing (or the use of alcohol-based sanitiser), strict cough/sneeze etiquette and physical distancing. These are critical measures in the reduction of the community spread of COVID-19, in the knowledge that a

COVID-carrier may be infective without showing symptoms.

**Key hygiene measures;**

**Regular hand washing with soapy water for at least 20 seconds**

**Observance of physical distancing of 2 metres.**

**Coughing and sneezing into the crook of your elbow**

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS FOR POOLS AND TRAINING SPACES**

Swimming pools by functional design, bring people into close proximity. Consequently athletes, coaches and other staff should respect physical distancing during all phases of training and, where appropriate, consider the use of protective masks when physical distancing is not always possible. Obviously, this does not include water-based activities.

At this point it is important to mention that normal pool sanitation with chlorine has been shown to inactivate the COVID-19 virus. FINA has received confirmation of this through a recent study conducted by the University Medical Center of Utrecht (NED) providing evidence that COVID-19 inactivation occurs in chlorinated water at conditions that are acceptable to swimmers.

Physical distancing in swimming pool precincts can be facilitated through separate entry and exit points, clear signage, floor markings to indicate social distancing and the installation of markers (cones, lines, stickers) on the pool deck or in dry land areas. In some facilities, athletes are encouraged to arrive in their training gear and avoid using communal showers and changing areas. There is also varying international opinion regarding spectators or non-essential attendees at training or practice sessions.

**Any aquatic athlete, coach or essential support staff attending a pool for training must observe agreed physical distancing and hygiene standards.**

#### **5. USE OF EQUIPMENT**

Obviously, it is preferable for every aquatic athlete to be responsible for their own personalised training equipment including towels and footwear.

Here are a few common examples of training equipment:



Simple cleaning using approved disinfectants will inactivate the COVID-19 virus and this should be undertaken before and after any training session. The same applies to all equipment and gym bags brought home after each training session. Obviously, athletes should not share training equipment. At the pool, personal items and clothing (backpacks, jackets, shoes, etc.) should be limited to essential items and stored separately.

Coaches should also observe appropriate physical distancing when communicating with athletes, while avoiding the sharing of hand-held equipment, including stopwatches, clipboards, or pens, with coaching colleagues. It is strongly advised to disinfect this equipment after each training session.

## 6. DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

While the generic recommendations mentioned above apply across the board, each aquatic discipline carries its own unique challenges. Here are a few helpful suggestions.

### **Swimming**

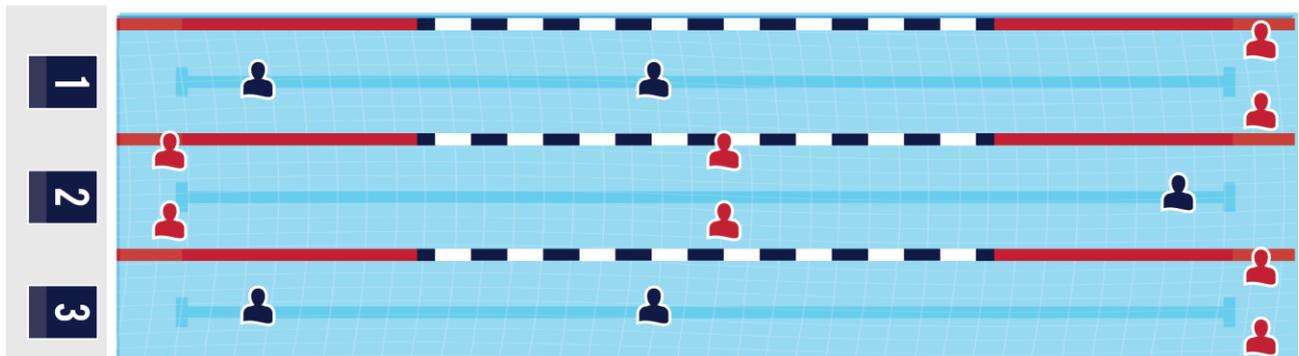
Generally, the pool set-up including the installation of lane ropes and backstroke flags should be the responsibility of the facility authorities. Where this is not possible, appointed

squad personnel should be responsible for this under agreed safety protocols. Remembering that chlorinated swimming pool water is considered a safe and COVID-free environment, the major issue with swim training is the application of acceptable physical distancing. Clearly this will limit the size of a squad able to use the pool at any one time. The following guidelines are examples of how this may be achieved.

- Max 4 swimmers per lane (25m pool); 8 swimmers per lane (50m pool).
- Alternate start ends for each lane e.g. lane 1 start this end; lane 2 start far end.
- Min 5 sec gap between swimmers to ensure minimum 1m physical separation.
- Limit squad size to ensure maximum lane usage.

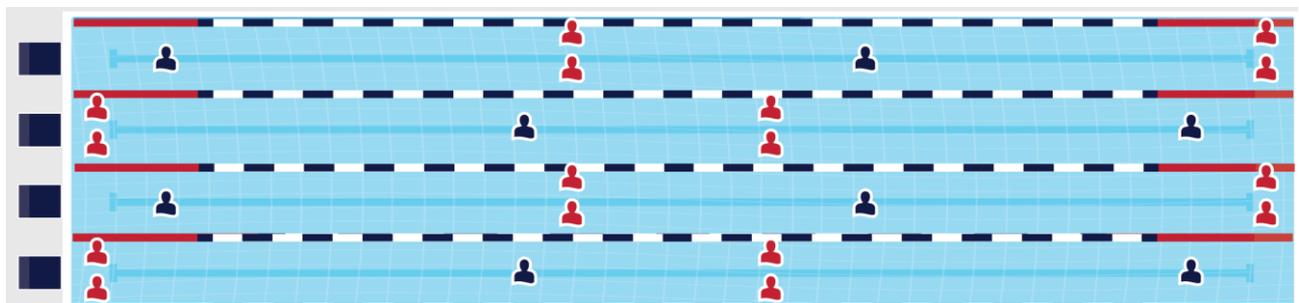
Examples:

### 25m pool



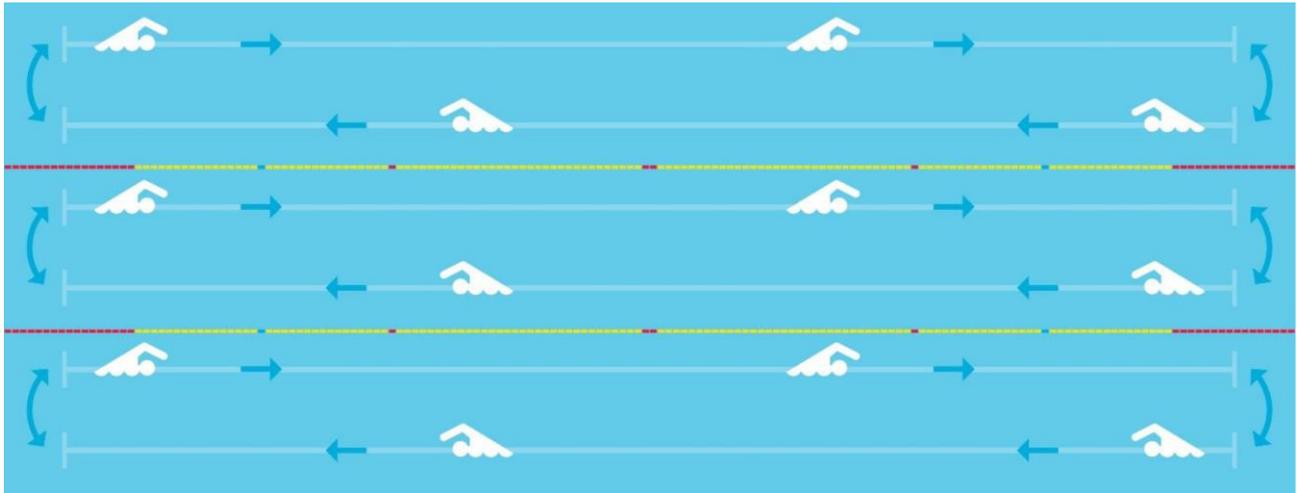
Source: USA Swimming

### 50m pool



Source: USA Swimming

## Double lane



Source : Swimming Canada

## Diving

A challenge facing divers is the potential for the transmission of infection through contaminated diving boards and platforms, including handrails and ladders. These areas should be cleaned prior to and following any training session, acknowledging the “foot traffic” while understanding that boards and platforms are constantly wet with chlorinated water. The sharing of towels and “shammies” must be avoided. Dry land training will require separate management in accordance with hygiene and safety protocols acceptable to the local health authority.

- Divers should maintain 2m distance at all times – particularly when waiting to use boards.
- Cones are helpful to delineate spacing while divers await their turn to dive
- Divers warming up should observe the 2m physical distance on the pool deck or when swimming widths of pool.
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## Artistic Swimming

Athletes must not use any shared equipment such as yoga mats or stretch cords. Ideally one coach should be responsible for the sound system and/or the tablets, cleaned with hand sanitiser. To provide swimmer feedback, it is preferable, if possible, to connect with a poolside TV, so athletes can maintain physical distancing. In addition, coaches should;

- Modify size of training group to ensure 2m distancing
- Minimise land-based training, keeping poolside sessions for warm-up stretching
- Stipulate use of personal towels rather than communal mats for warm-ups.
- Build conditioning training into artistic specific workouts

- Allow lane swimming in compliance with earlier suggestions for swimming
- Insist on a 1m distance between swimmers for figures/technique training,
- Avoid patterns, lifts or joined movements in routine training.
- Insist that swimmers conduct land drill , 2m apart.
- Use duct tape on the pool deck to delineate physical distance when land drilling.

### **Water Polo**

For water polo players undertaking routine lane swim training, the recommendations previously described should be applied. The use of caps is not recommended while water polo ball skills training is undertaken, however physical distancing should be enforced. This will limit the size of squads training together.

Indicative numbers for full pool bookings are:

- A maximum of 30 athletes per 25m pool
- A maximum of 60 athletes per 50m pool

In addition, poolside warm-ups should be minimized with coaches maintaining physical distancing during all phases of training. The same limitations imposed upon the use of facility amenities including showers and change rooms should also be applied and spectators or non-participating players should be discouraged from attending. Water polo balls, constantly immersed in chlorinated water, present a minimal risk for infection.

### **Open water swimming**

Obviously, open water swimmers undertaking pool-based training should follow the recommendations that apply to pool swimmers. And clearly, training at open water venues will demand compliance with the safety protocols enforced by local authorities. Personal hygiene and physical distancing recommendations will apply as necessary.

## **7. RETURN TO COMPETITION**

We are all well aware that major international events including the Olympic Games and FINA World Championships have been unavoidably postponed. The impact of these decisions has had immeasurable effect on all aquatic athletes.

However, it is not within the scope of these guidelines to address issues that govern the return to a full programme of major events. These decisions are made in accordance with a

complicated matrix of risk assessment that examines the characteristics of a specific mass gathering event, predicated by the accessibility of international borders. The ultimate decision is dictated by the jurisdiction of the host country or community that accounts for the associated risk of COVID-19 transmission.

As a responsible international federation, FINA remains obligated to the health and welfare of its athletes and remains informed by the WHO general COVID-19 risk assessment and mitigation checklist. Any future determination of a return to major FINA events will remain informed by the changing international landscape, ensuring that all aquatic athletes have an equal opportunity to train and ultimately compete in the safest possible environment.

**We hope that you find these Guidelines helpful. The FINA COVID-19 Task Force remains at your disposal for additional advice or specific references that will facilitate a safe return to aquatic sport for all members of the FINA Family.**

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