

# Admission Standards for Public Pools – Coroner’s Recommendations

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This document provides information about the Office of the Chief Coroner’s recommended admission standards for supervised public pools in Ontario. Should you have any further questions regarding the promotion or application of the recommended admission standards, please email us at [Environmental.Health@ontario.ca](mailto:Environmental.Health@ontario.ca)

**Q1: What are the recommended admission standards?**

A1: Admission standards apply child to parent/guardian ratios as a means of increasing direct supervision of young children, particularly those that are non-swimmers. The additional level of supervision assists lifeguards in maintaining adequate surveillance of the whereabouts and activities of young bathers while inside the pool enclosure.

The Office of the Chief Coroner’s (Coroner) recommended admission standards for supervised public pools are:

Children under the age of ten (10) would require supervision or be able to demonstrate comfort in the water by passing a facility swim test.

- A child under the age of ten is assumed to be a non-swimmer upon admittance to the pool and must be accompanied and directly supervised by a guardian of at least 12 years of age. The guardian is not required to be a swimmer.
- Children aged 6 to 9 may be admitted unaccompanied if they can pass a facility swim test administered by a lifeguard.
- All children under the age of 6 must be accompanied and directly supervised by a guardian.

Table 1.0: Recommended Supervision Ratio<sup>1</sup>

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|---|--|
| Children under age 6                      | Two children to one guardian (2:1)   |
| Children aged 6 to 9 who are non-swimmers | Four children to one guardian (4:1)<br>or<br>Eight children with lifejackets to one guardian (8:1) |

**Q2: Why the need for admission standards in public pools?**

A2: While drowning deaths in public pools are relatively rare, examination of the circumstances of recent child deaths have demonstrated that there is still room for improvement in terms of guardian supervision.

**Q3: What is meant by a “supervised” pool?**

A3. A supervised pool is one that requires the presence of lifeguards (Class A pools).

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<sup>1</sup> Ratios of instructors/lifeguards to bathers must also be maintained as per the Public Pools Regulation.

**Q4: What are Class A and Class B pools?**

A4: *Class A pools:*

- Open to the general public; are part of community centre, YMCA, or similar institution supported by public funds; or at recreational camp.
- Must be supervised by lifeguards during “non-instructional swim settings” (e.g., recreational swims, group rentals).

*Class B pools:*

- Pools at apartment buildings and condominiums (of five or more units), mobile home parks, hotels, campgrounds, clubs, day nurseries, day camps and treatment facilities.
- The majority fall under the Public Pools Regulation (R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 565) supervision exemptions (therefore most Class B pools would only be requested to post, but not be expected to apply admission standards).
- Class B pools are exempt from lifeguard supervision requirements if they:
  - Have a water surface area that is less than 93 sq. metres; and
  - Post a sign stating that the pool is unsupervised and bathers under age 12 are not allowed within the pool enclosure unless accompanied by a parent or his/her agent who is not less than 16 years of age.
- Class B pools can also be exempt from life guard supervision if the water surface area is larger than 93 sq. metres if they post a similar notice as above, and indicate that the number of bathers on deck and in the pool shall not exceed 10.

**Q5: Why do Class B pools, in order to be exempt from lifeguard supervision under Reg. 565, require a signage that states “bathers under age 12 are not allowed within the pool enclosure unless accompanied by a parent or his/her agent who is not less than 16 years of age”, while the recommended admission standards require children under 10 years to be accompanied by a guardian who is at least 12 years of age?**

A5: Class A pools are required to be supervised by lifeguards. The intent of the recommended admission standards is to provide an additional level of personal supervision for non-swimmers under age 10 (and all children under age 6).

Class B pools are in most cases unsupervised (no lifeguards), so it is appropriate to require a more mature guardian (minimum age 16 years) to supervise children under 12 in these settings.

**Q6: Are these recommended admission standards different from the admission standards previously circulated to pool owners/operators by local public health units?**

A6: No, the recommended admission standards are the same as those previously circulated by public health units.

**Q7: Are the recommended admission standards a legislative requirement?**

A7: No, the admission standards are not required under the Public Pools Regulation. However, the Coroner’s Office, Lifesaving Society, Canadian Red Cross (CRC) and other

agencies support the application of the recommended standards to increase safety of young bathers using public pools across the province.

**Q8: What is being asked of public pool owners/operators?**

A8: Public pool owners/operators are being asked to voluntarily:

- Post pool admission standards in specified locations at all Class A (supervised) pools;
- Have a means in place to ensure that children under 10 years of age are accompanied with appropriate supervision when admitted to the pool; and
- Parents/guardians are made aware of their responsibility to supervise the children in their care at all times in accordance with the admission standards.

**Q9: Will the admission standards apply when a private group rents out a public pool, such as a birthday party or for use by a day camp?**

A9: Yes, owners and operators of public pools are encouraged to bring the recommended admission standards to the attention of all pool users, regardless of the purpose for which the pool is being used for. The standards would need to be posted by all Class A and Class B pools, and owners/operators would need to apply the standards at all Class A pools and supervised Class B pools, except where an exemption exists (e.g., instructional swimming lessons).

**Q10. Are there any exemptions to the recommended admission standards?**

A10. When conducting an activity such as swimming lessons in a controlled setting, adherence to the recommended admission standards is not necessary given the additional control and supervision being provided.

**Q11: What about pools and splash pads in provincial parks?**

A11: Public pools operated by provincial parks are subject to the same requirements under Regulation 565 (Public Pools) as all Class A or Class B pools, and would be subject to the recommended admission standards.

Splash pads are not currently regulated under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)*. However, boards of health are required to routinely inspect splash pads while operating to monitor the safety of these facilities and investigate complaints and/or reports of illness or injury.

**Q12: What about water parks and water slides?**

A12: Public pools operated by water parks are subject to requirements under Regulation 565 (Public Pools), and therefore would be asked to apply the recommended admission standards.

Waterslide receiving basins operated by water parks that have a water depth of greater than 0.75m and are used for other purposes such as swimming are subject to Regulation 565 (Public Pools), and therefore would also be subject to the recommended admission standards.

Waterslide receiving basins operated by water parks that have a water depth of 0.75m or less or are not used for purposes other than slide receiving basins are not currently regulated under Regulation 565 (Public Pools), and therefore would not be subject to the recommended admission standards.

**Q13: What would be an example of a “means” to ensure that children are accompanied by appropriate supervision when admitted to the pool?**

A13: One example that could be adapted by a pool owner/operator is the Lifesaving Society’s “Red Yellow Green System” which uses a colour-coded bracelet system. For example, a yellow bracelet could identify a child that is under age 10 and accompanied with a guardian. A red bracelet could identify if the child is unaccompanied and therefore required to pass a swim facility test. A green bracelet may be granted to a child under age 10 but over 6 years that passes a swim facility test and therefore does not require supervision.

**Q14. How can the recommended admission standards be applied and promoted?**

A14. One example that could be adapted by a pool owner/operator is the Lifesaving Society’s “Red Yellow Green System” which uses a colour-coded bracelet system to denote areas of the pool enclosure where bathers must remain.

Admission standards may be promoted by:

- Posting the standards within the pool facility visible to all bathers;
- Promoted to individuals arriving to the pool facility through written handouts; and
- Posting the information on the pools website.

**Q15: How do operators of public pools determine if a child is a non-swimmer?**

A15: A child under age 10 is assumed to be a “non-swimmer” upon being admitted to the public pool. A child aged 6 to 9 years old may be determined to be a “swimmer” if they are able to demonstrate comfort in the water and pass a facility swim test.

The Lifesaving Society publishes guidelines on conducting facility swim tests. They recommend that individuals should be able to demonstrate comfort in the water by swimming a minimum of two widths of the pool (approx. 50m) continuously in shallow water.

**Q16: My child is over 9 years old but won't turn 10 for another two months. Should he/she be admitted unaccompanied?**

A16: Until a child has had their 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, they are still considered to be less than 10 years of age and therefore should be accompanied by a guardian who is at least 12 years old. Children aged 6 to 9 who pass the facility swim test may be admitted unaccompanied.

**Q17: Do other provinces have admission standards for public pools?**

A17: No other provinces/territories have regulations governing public pools that contain admission standards.

Northwest Territories is the only province/territory with some admission standard requirements (i.e., children under seven years must be accompanied and directly supervised by a person 12 years of age or older while in or about the pool and operators must post this requirement) Public Pool Regulations, R.R.N.W.T. 1990, C. P-21.

Alberta is considering pool admission standards as part of a broader review of pool legislation in response to recommendations from a May 2009 Public Fatality Inquiry.

**Q18: Are other public pool owners/operators in Ontario currently using admission standards?**

A18: 70-80% of supervised pools in Ontario have voluntarily implemented some form of admission standards, including 100% of the fifteen largest municipalities.

Since admission standards are not regulated, many municipalities have chosen to make their admission standard policy stricter than those proposed by the Coroner's Office (e.g., guardians of an older age, lower ratios of children to parent/guardian, etc)

**Q19: The admission standards have a different supervision ratio if children are wearing lifejackets. What about water wings or other flotation devices?**

A19. Water wings or other flotation devices have the potential of allowing a child to move into an unsafe position as they are not designed and fitted to protect the user in the same way that lifejackets are. Therefore, only approved lifejackets should be used for the protection of children.

**Q20: How many drowning deaths occur in Ontario? For young children, what are those attributed to?**

A20: Between 2000 and 2004, the average annual number of deaths due to drowning in Ontario was 142. Ten percent were children under the age of 12. Lack of supervision from parents or caregivers is associated with most drowning deaths of young children (Lifesaving Society, 2008).

**Q21: What are the responsibilities of guardians under the regulation?**

A21: The Public Pools Regulation does not impose any requirements directly on the guardians. However, it is anticipated for guardians to be on or near the pool deck, depending on the features of the particular pool, and that they will call for help from lifeguards, pool staff and/or emergency responders if a child is in trouble.

**Q22: Does this in any way change the obligations if a parent has a child or children enrolled in the Canadian Red Cross swimming instruction?**

A22: No. It is expected that when swimming lessons are conducted that the oversight of those in the pool would be adequately provided for by the number of trained water safety instructors and lifeguards.

**Q23: Is 12 years of age old enough to supervise?**

A23: The age of 12 was recommended by the Coroner's Office as a minimum age for supervision requirements based on expert advice and research on typical babysitting ages. The supervision role under the admission standards does not replace the regulated required supervision provided by lifeguards. Rather, it relieves lifeguards from having to take on duties such as babysitting that distracts them from their required duties of supervising bathers in the pool. A 12 year old can take a child to the bathroom and can also call for help if they see a child in distress.

**Q24: Are the recommended admission standards practical?**

A24: While drowning deaths in a public pools are relatively rare, examination of the circumstances of two recent child deaths have demonstrated that there is room for improvement in terms of guardian supervision. Preliminary consultation on the Coroner's recommendations revealed that a large number of pools have successfully adopted some form of an admission standard policy and have systems in place to manage the policy, as well as lifejackets available for children who do not have/cannot purchase their own.

Messaging would underscore the importance of guardian supervision in the context of providing children with a safe opportunity to learn to swim and to develop swimming skills. The recommended standards seek to find ways to help children come to pools rather than turning them away (e.g., operators could maintain a record of children that have passed the facility swim test and issue a fabric badge to sew onto their bathing suit).

**Q25: How could I get more information on admission standards to better protect users of my swimming pool?**

A25: The Canadian Red Cross (CRC) and Lifesaving Society offer training in aquatic supervision. The CRC offers a swim teacher program designed to improve the overall approach to safe use of pool and waterfronts. *This is offered to those that already have training in lifeguarding.* The Lifesaving Society offers programs to both lifeguard trained and non-lifeguard trained individuals:

- “Aquatic Management Training” is targeted to non-aquatic individuals providing information to help ensure the safety of swimming facilities.
- “Aquatic Supervisor Training” is for those holding lifeguard training certification (National Lifeguard Services Certificate).