



Swimming

Council Approval: Required

High Risk

Tier 1

Activity Permitted For: D B J C S A

About Swimming

Swimming is a Girl Scout tradition that builds fitness, leadership and team-building skills. Your troop can swim in pools, water parks, or natural bodies of water like oceans, rivers or lakes. Safety is one of the keys to having fun in the water. Consult a local parks and recreation department, YMCA, or American Red Cross for swimming lessons. There is a swim test form provided below at the end of this Swimming chapter to document a girl's successful completion of swimming test and to categorize her swimming ability level.

Learn more:

- Learn swimming strokes. What's the difference between butterfly and breaststroke? How do you do a flip turn? Get some ideas at [Enjoy Swimming](#)
- Create swimming games. Marco Polo and Find the Penny are popular swimming games, but you can make up your own, too. Get more ideas at [Pool Games](#).

Also see:

- Swimming World Magazine: [Pool Games](#)
- YMCA Safety Around Water: [The Y: Safety Around Water](#)
- American Red Cross lifeguard training: [Lifeguard and Water Safety Training](#)
- USA Swimming: [USA Swimming](#)

Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Contact the pool operator in advance. Ask about accommodating people with disabilities.

Additional resources:

See [Disabled Sports USA](#) to find out about swimming inclusion.

Check out [World Para Swimming](#) to learn about inspiring swimmers of all abilities.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Identify lifeguard(s). When using a staffed public facility, lifeguards will be provided. At beaches or waterfronts, make sure a lifeguard will be on duty. For swimming on your own, you'll need to recruit a lifeguard. Ask your council for suggestions. At least one lifeguard, certified in American Red Cross Lifeguard Training, and one watcher are present at all times. When using more than one lifeguard, lifeguards under 18 may be included in the total, as long as there is at least 1 adult lifeguard also present. Additional lifeguards and watchers may be needed; see the table below.

Exception for lake, rivers, streams: At least one lifeguard, certified in American Red Cross Waterfront Lifeguard course or the equivalent, is present for every 25 swimmers, plus one watcher for every 10 swimmers.

Exception for pools: For swimming activities in public pools, hotel and cruise-ship pools, and backyard pools, the lifeguards are at least 16 years old and have American Red Cross Lifeguard Training certification or the equivalent. When girls are wading in water more than knee-deep, an adult with American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue certification or with documented experience according to your council's guidelines.

Identify watchers. One adult watcher is needed for every ten swimmers. This person assists the group by watching for possible emergencies. Lifeguards and watchers are stationed at separate posts. They stay out of the water, except in emergencies. American Red Cross (ARC) Basic Water Rescue, YMCA Aquatics Safety Assistant, or similar training is the preferred preparation. Alternately, the lifeguard may be able to give watchers an orientation. Again, check with your council in advance.

These numbers are a minimum. The ratio of lifeguards and watchers to swimmers may need to be increased depending on the number of girls in one area, swimming level and ability, girls with disabilities, age level and ability to follow instructions, type of swimming activity (instruction, recreation), type of swimming area, weather / water conditions, and rescue equipment available.

Swimming Lifeguards and Watchers Ratios

Number of Swimmers	Lifeguards	Watchers (1:10 ratio)
1–10	1 adult (see exception for pools above)	1*
11–25	1 adult (see exception for pools above)	2-3*
26–35	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	3-4*
36–50	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	4-5*

****Some states allow watchers to be under the age of 18, but in all states, they must be at least 16 years of age.***

Clearly identify swimming abilities. These could be indicated, for example, with different colored wristbands to signify beginners, intermediate, and advanced swimmers. Swim tests can be conducted in advance, or on the day of swimming. The pool operator or lifeguard may determine the type of swim test, based on the skills needed. Some examples:

- In pools, the lifeguard can ask each participant to enter the water slowly, stay close to the edge of the pool, swim from one end to the other, and then float for 30 seconds.
- In lakes, the lifeguard can ask each participant to jump into the water, swim for 50 yards, then float or tread water for one minute.
- In surf, the swimming test should be held in advance. The lifeguard asks each participant to jump into water over her head, swim 100 yards using a combination of freestyle and elementary backstroke, and then tread water for two minutes.

Ensure swimming site safety. Check for the following:

- A posting indicates water quality passes health department tests and sanitation standards.
- Shallow areas are marked “No Diving.”
- Diving areas are separate from other swim areas.
- Chlorine levels are tested and maintained. Water should be clear.
- The area around the pool is free of clutter.
- No electrical appliances are anywhere near the pool.
- The swimming area should be free from dangerous marine life and clearly marked.
- No sharp, rocky, or heavily shelled beach waters should be chosen, if possible.
- At water parks, do not dive or run. Most water park injuries are from slips and falls.
- Participants should know their physical limits. Observe a water ride before going on. Use extra care on water slides.
- Monitor time in the water. How long should participants swim? Swimmers’ ability, weather conditions, and water temperature should be considered. Often, 30-minute time periods are plenty.
- Swim only during daylight or in well-lit pools.
- Diving is prohibited in waters of unknown depth or conditions. For all diving, the required water depth extends 10 feet on each side of the board or jumping point. If tides, drought, or other forces affect the water depth, it is checked each time before diving is permitted. Girls do not dive off the side of the board.

Safety Gear.

Ask the pool operator or lifeguard what’s available:

- Reaching pole
- Rescue tube
- Backboard
- Ring buoy
- Throw bag with line (typically 30

feet) For open water:

- Paddle board
- Rescue can
- Kayak
- Other available rescue gear

Additional Gear.

- Goggles
- Swim cap
- Nose and ear plugs for girls who need them

Swimming Test. The next page provides an example of the documentation which demonstrates that a girl has passed the requirement of swim test. Please note that the level of swimming ability is distinguished. Girls should swim only up to their ability, as certified by an adult, lifeguard or swim instructor.