

Safety Guidelines

for Adult Triathlon Club sessions

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The following are best practice guidelines for Triathlon Ireland club sessions. They are intended to provide structure and safety information to clubs. These safety guidelines should be used for all sessions with or without a coach.

These procedures were submitted and approved by the Triathlon Ireland Safeguarding Committee and CEO. All previous procedures are superseded by this version with effect from September 2021.

Any issues arising from the transition between previous procedures and these shall be determined by the CEO, in consultation, where such issues are material, with the President.

This document may be amended from time to time by Triathlon Ireland (Thereafter TI). The definitive text of this document in force from time to time is the version contained on the TI

internal server under Club Resources. Any printed text or electronic copy held elsewhere is only a snapshot of the text at the time it is printed, copied or downloaded.

planning a session overview

The following planning and safety information is applicable to all coached and uncoached junior sessions including, but not limited to, track, pool, turbo, open road, and open water.

RISK ASSESSMENT (RA): Check that equipment and venue are safe and suitable for participants and activities planned.

DYNAMIC RISK ASSESSMENT: Effective risk assessment is not just about planning in advance but also managing dynamically while sessions are in progress. For example changeable weather conditions while in open water.

PARTICIPANT SCREENING: Check that activities are appropriate to the capabilities and health and fitness of participants.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (EAP): Have a plan of what to do in case of an emergency, which includes ensuring a means of raising an alarm, adequate access for emergency services, means of evacuation and register of attendees in case of evacuation. Key to this is individuals understanding their role in the EAP.

FIRST AID PROVISION: Access to a trained first aider and first aid equipment.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: Ensure everyone involved in the planning and delivery of the session knows the emergency procedures.

REVIEW SESSIONS AND RECORD ACCIDENTS AND INCIDENTS: Have a process for improving the system based on experience. .

Running a Session

WHO CAN RUN A SESSION? One person or a group of people should take charge of organising and facilitating a session. Where there is no coach this may fall to the committee, a TRI Leader, or another club member. The session leader does not have to be a coach. Any club member can organise and facilitate an adult session but may not coach if they are not qualified. This person, if not a coach, is not personally responsible for the safety of the participants and this should be made clear to participants, however, this

session leader should do everything possible to make the session safe through the use of the RA and EAP. The session leader should; send out pre-session information, including safety and logistical information, manage session registration and hold emergency contact and medical information for those taking part securely in case of emergency.

risk assessments

Safety Risk Assessment

The coach/leader/session facilitator should create a **risk assessment** for all venues/locations and club sessions which should be reviewed and updated regularly, particularly in the event of an incident.

This should take into account the venue, different participant ages and ability levels, weather, first aid availability and equipment to be used. By undertaking a risk assessment, the club is able to demonstrate that they have considered the risks and taken reasonable steps to manage them. A good risk assessment drives action – it doesn't avoid risk. The risk assessment must be specific to the venue and the activity and should be informed by site visits.

It is neither possible nor necessary to ensure that sessions are entirely risk free. The focus should be to identify the main hazards and the controls that can be put in place to either eliminate the risk of these hazards, or, if this is not possible, manage it to an acceptable level. Only control measures which will

actually be implemented should be included. It is sensible and appropriate to create a risk assessment once for a given venue and share this document between all coaches delivering coached sessions. If the activity is to take place again the RA should be reviewed prior to each session and should be assessed dynamically during a session.

When operating in a managed facility, the RA should take into account and adhere to, venue specific normal operating procedures (NOP). In the vast majority of cases, the coaches RA will be a 'slimmed down' version of the venue NOP and only cover aspects which are relevant to the coach, athletes and the coached session content. Where an employer, manager of a facility or organiser's policy or actions cause an unsafe coaching environment then the coach should raise this issue with that individual and seek to resolve the issue prior to the session. If it cannot be resolved satisfactorily then the coach should consider cancelling the session on safety grounds.

RA should be reviewed and updated following: Any incident or near miss (i.e. when an accident could have occurred, but by luck it didn't), any updates from the venue, e.g. revision of venue NOP, and on an annual basis as a minimum, which in turn should prompt a conversation with the venue to assess any changes.

See [risk assessment here](#) Please note the risks outlined in the RA document are not exhaustive and risks will differ for each venue.

RECORDING THE FINDINGS.

The RA should be recorded and for each potential hazard it should identify:

- The level of risk.
- Who it may affect.
- The control measures.
- Who is responsible for implementing each control.

RESIDUAL RISK. If the residual risk is still not acceptable a session should not go ahead.

emergency action plan

The coach/leader/session facilitator should create an EAP for all venues and sessions detailing what actions the coach and participants will take to maintain participant safety and welfare in the case of an incident occurring which should be accessible to all coaches. The EAP should be reviewed and updated regularly particularly in the event of an incident. Everyone involved should be clear on their role in the EAP. If a club is using the same locations/venues for numerous sessions the same EAP can be used, however, the 'designated lead' (an individual who takes the lead in the case of an emergency) should be noted on the session sign in documents.

Managed facilities should have their own EAP and procedures which the coach should be familiar with. The coach should also have their own EAP, which will work in conjunction with the facility EAP, but in most cases will be a condensed version that covers all information relevant to the coach and athletes, and will usually detail how to assist venue staff in ensuring

safety. For non-managed facilities the coach will need to cover actions to be taken in a number of possible situations. This plan should be in sufficient detail that it describes a step by step process of what to do in an emergency, For example:

- Major Injuries (potentially life threatening).
- Need for Evacuation (e.g. fire, structural failure).
- Minor Injuries.

For outdoor venues some or all of the following may also be required:

- Missing persons.
- Adverse weather conditions.

The EAP should provide sufficient details to both contact and direct emergency services to the venue and on how emergency first aid will be provided.

coaching

Coaching/Tri Leader Insurance

TI provides Professional Indemnity coaching insurance for all coaches who have been trained and qualified by TI. For TI coaching insurance to be valid, coaches must hold a minimum of a

training licence. A coach will only be covered for the activities they have been trained to deliver. Coaches/Leaders must have completed all the requirements to obtain their certificate and keep

their safeguarding requirements (Garda vetting/Access NI, Safeguard course, signed code of conduct) up to date.

Coaching Remits-Adult Sessions

TRI LEADER

In an ideal scenario a Tri Leader is supported by a club coach. However, this isn't always possible. The Tri Leader remit includes the below:

- Can assist a Level 1 or 2 coach.
- Can set up a session, complete the safety documentation and provide session details from a session plan prepared by a coach. A Tri Leader can lead parts of the session for example warm up and cool down under the supervision of a coach or independently where necessary following consultation with the coach and using guidelines set out by a coach.
- Can organise and facilitate (set up) any adult session - enclosed, open road or open water - and lead any enclosed adult session (pool, turbo, track, park etc.) This means they can set up a session, complete the safety documentation, manage sign in, send out session information, give the group information on safety and outline the session plan for the group including the aims of

the session and what the group will be doing. This may include demonstrations and explanations of the session as per the coaches guidelines for the session.

- A Tri Leader should be supported by other Tri Leaders.
- A Tri Leader can take part in an adult session while leading only if it is safe to do so, however this should be included in the risk assessment for the session.

LEVEL 1 COACH

- Can plan and deliver group sessions in enclosed areas for adults and juniors. This means they can coach during the sessions. Enclosed areas refers to pools, running tracks, parks, car parks, sports halls.
- Can plan, outline and supervise adult open water and open road sessions.
- Can provide a plan and deliver an adult or junior open water session once the TI Open Water module has been successfully completed and sufficient support is in place.

→ Can provide a plan and deliver an adult or junior open road session once the Cycling Ireland 'Ride Leader' or TI equivalent (to be delivered in 2021) CPD has been completed.

→ Cannot take part in a session while coaching.

LEVEL 2 COACH

- Can plan and deliver group and individual sessions including open water and open road for adults and juniors.
- Can coach during all sessions.
- Cannot take part in a session while coaching.

It is strongly recommended by TI that a coach should not take part in the session as a participant. Coaching requires observation and feedback and a continual awareness of the bigger picture in terms of dynamic risk assessment, all these elements are significantly compromised by the coach taking part in a session.

Coaching Ratios

It is the responsibility of the coach to ensure that the group is adequately supervised. The coaching ratios outlined in this document provide a minimum participant : coach/leader/club volunteer ratio to ensure a safe coaching session and provide meaningful coaching to any participant who is having difficulties. Coaches must only coach the number of triathletes they feel confident and competent to deal with, within the recommendations. Younger children, beginners and those with disabilities or special needs, for example, may require

extra supervision. A coach should not take a dual role during a session, for example coach and lifeguard. The ratios below are for coaching during a session and not safeguarding requirement ratios. An experienced coach may be able to facilitate a larger session (within the required ratio limits) in an enclosed area such as track or turbo sessions if the group is working from a session plan. The number of participants will depend on a range of factors including: safety cover, the environment, level of experience of participants, the coaches'

experience and additional training. Coaches can be assisted by other coaches and leaders in order to increase the number of participants permitted in the session.

When coaching, the coach should adopt positions where they take an appropriate balance between being able to observe and feedback to participants, whilst maintaining a safe environment. Where there is a conflict between these two elements, safety should take precedence.

Regardless of group size, it is recommended that when coaching young athletes, there are a sufficient number of responsible adults present at all times to ensure an adequate level of supervision. This is important for safeguarding reasons so that one coach

is not alone with the junior athletes and means that in an emergency one adult can go for help or deal with the emergency.

It is good practice to have a clear and accurate record of everyone involved

in the delivery of the session. This will ensure the coach is able to identify who attended a particular session should an issue be raised at a later date.

TRI LEADER	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2
POOL BASED SWIMMING SESSIONS (LIFEGUARD PRESENT)		
Can set up, facilitate and lead a session.	1:8	1:16
OPEN WATER SWIM SESSIONS (SEPARATE LIFEGUARD AND FIRST AIDER PRESENT)		
Can set up, facilitate a session and assist a coach. (Not covered to coach or lead).	1:6 ONCE OPEN WATER CPD COMPLETED	1:14
CYCLING ENCLOSED AREA FOR EXAMPLE; PARK, TURBO SESSIONS (NO TRAFFIC)		
Can set up, facilitate a session and assist a coach. (Not covered to coach or lead).	1:16	1:20
CYCLING INDOOR SESSION		
Can set up, facilitate and lead session	1:16	1:24
CYCLING OPEN ROAD		
Can set up, facilitate a session and assist a coach. (not covered to coach or lead)	1:6 RIDE LEADER IS COMPLETE	1:8
RUNNING ENCLOSED AREA		
Can set up, facilitate and lead session.	1:20	1:24
RUNNING OPEN ROAD		
Can set up, facilitate a session and assist a coach. (not covered to coach or lead)	1:10	1:20

NOTE: These ratios are for coaching during a session. An experienced coach may be able to facilitate a larger session in an enclosed area such as track or turbo sessions if the group is working from a session plan.

Example Scenarios

SWIMMING POOL: 3 lanes 24 participants. A pool session covered by a Level 2 and Level 1 coach, with 3 lanes. Level 2 is responsible for 2 lanes and Level 1 for one lane. Provided lifeguard ratios (usually 1:25) are not exceeded then the session can be considered safe, especially if the Level 2 coach takes 16 athletes and the Level 1 takes 8 athletes. If on occasion the Level 2 coach is replaced by a competent Level 1 coach and a Tri Leader this could still be safe, as the lifeguard manages the majority of the safety aspects. The coaches should focus on ensuring safety, and then may provide some coaching. Their ability to manage a high-quality session may not

be as high as if the Level 2 were present, however it is safe and allows the session to continue.

SWIMMING POOL: Whole pool, 30+ participants. Safe options would include two Level 2 coaches, or a Level 2 and two or more Level 1 coaches. However, most pools have a lifeguard ratio of 1:25, so a second lifeguard may be required for safety purposes. Consider the balance of experience of the coaches. An experienced Level 2 should be confident in this situation, but a newly qualified Level 2 who is leading a session with two Level 1 coaches and 30+ swimmers may find it harder to manage the safety

aspects and two other coaches whilst also delivering sessions themselves.

CLOSED ROAD CYCLING CIRCUIT: 20 adults. An experienced Level 2 may be able to cover this session with some additional help, especially if the group is out of sight for a while. A lot may depend upon the experience of the athletes. It would be sensible to reduce numbers for a novice session. The issues are mainly concerned with managing the group(s) so there are no collisions. Collisions are much more likely with novice athletes; however more advanced athletes may also be a risk if they are undertaking a demanding session at speed.

uncoached adult club sessions

TI recognises that not all clubs have qualified coaches and TI insurance allows for this.

Clubs can still run sessions including adult open water swim sessions and adult open road cycle sessions, however only a coach can coach during these sessions. In the absence of a coach another club member, preferably a TRI Leader can facilitate and lead a session. This means they can organise a club

session following the safety guidelines outlined here. These sessions can be either just an unstructured swim or cycle or those in the session can practice skills, drills etc. based on a session plan discussed with a coach in advance. Prior to the session the group can discuss what they will do in the session but they will not be coached during the session by the session leader. These sessions must comply with all the safety guidelines of a coached session.

NOTE: All club members must be both club and Triathlon Ireland members in order to have insurance cover for sessions. Individuals can attend up to 3 sessions prior to joining a club and will be insured for those 3 sessions- this does not apply to open water sessions for safety reasons.

enclosed sessions

These can be run with or without a coach/tri leader. These include track training, turbo sessions, park sessions and pool sessions.

Safety

Create a [Risk Assessment document](#) and [Emergency Action Plan](#).

Participant Guidelines

Session information should be sent out prior to the session. This should include:

- Location and time of session.
- Completed RA and EAP.
- Who is coaching/leading the session.

- What ability level the session is suitable for.
- Structure of the session if working from a session plan.
- Rules for the session.

On The Day:

- The coach/leader should ensure that anyone with medical conditions has provided any relevant information

and all attendees have provided medical information and emergency contact(s).

- The coach/leader should provide sign in sheets/digital sign on option in advance.
- First Aider present.
- Lifeguard present if pool or open water session.
- Ability levels assessed and catered for.

open water sessions

Compared to a swimming pool there are a much greater number of challenges associated with open water swimming. The option to sign in for 3 sessions prior to joining a club does not apply to open water sessions for this reason.

The below guidance provides a framework for effective safety planning. It is intended to help establish new swimming venues as well as review safety management at existing venues.

Preparatory Pool Sessions

Individuals should attend pool sessions with the club prior to attending an open water swim session where they can be assessed by the club coach. These sessions should give an indication of ability level and readiness to move to

open water sessions. Whether they progress to club open water sessions can be at the discretion of the club coach who may feel the person needs further pool sessions or is ready to begin open water sessions. During the pool

sessions open water techniques should be introduced and practiced. Individuals should be able to competently swim 750 metres continuously in a pool before moving to open water.

Risk Assessment

Coach/leader should prepare a RA for the open water venue. In ROI, seek advice from the local authority, who have [water safety development officers](#), as they may have a RA document

completed by [Water Safety Ireland](#). In NI [DAERA](#) provides bathing water quality profiles. This will provide information for the club RA. The local authority development officer will also be able

to offer local knowledge of the swim area. Seek to link up with other users of the open water venue in order to share knowledge or pool resources.

Safety Considerations and Control Measures

The following are some safety considerations and control measures for the open water RA. This list is not exhaustive.

Swim Course

COURSE SHAPE: Is the swim course easy to follow? The simpler the course the less likely it is for swimmers to become disorientated and go off course. Straight line, rectangular, triangular and circular courses are generally easiest to follow. Out and back courses appear straightforward but consider arrangements to ensure that swimmers swimming in opposite directions are effectively segregated and cannot swim into each other.

ALTERNATE ROUTE: Is there another option or are there shorter options for less experienced swimmers?

OBSTRUCTIONS: Are there any obvious hazards that can affect the swimming such as debris, overhead branches, fast currents or rips?

SIZE: Is the area of water sufficient in size and of suitable depth to

accommodate the activity? What is the maximum number of swimmers that can be in the water at any time? Are there other users to consider?

ACCESS AND EGRESS: Can swimmers enter and exit the water safely and easily?

MONITORING SWIMMERS: Is it easy to account for the number of swimmers entering and exiting the water? Is there a plan/system to sign everyone in and out of the water? For example car keys left with someone on the shore which must be collected on egress from the water. This will make it quick and easy to identify a missing individual.

OTHER USERS: Is there exclusive use of the water (and therefore fewer restrictions on course design) or are there other water users/activities that

need to be considered? Where other activities are taking place at the same time is it possible to take steps to provide a safe swimming area? Can you share resources such as lifeguards with other users?

ACCLIMATISATION AREA: Is there a defined area where swimmers can safely acclimatise to the water temperature prior to undertaking their swim to minimise the impact of cold shock? This area does not need to be large and only needs to be deep enough for swimmers to fully immerse their body and put their faces in the water. Ideally swimmers should be able to wade into this area if possible.

Safety Cover Levels and Positioning

Given the differing types of water and prevailing conditions, applying generic standards to the level of safety cover required based on course design, swim distance, or ratio of safety units to swimmers is not appropriate. However, the following points provide an initial basis for identifying cover levels and positioning before considering other factors which may indicate a need to potentially increase or decrease those levels:

- **SH2OUT's** recommended guidance is that a swimmer in distress can be reached within one and returned to shore within 3 minutes if required.
- One human powered safety craft per 20 adult swimmers/10 junior swimmers.
- One powered craft per 50 swimmers.
- Swimmers are no more than 50 metres from safety cover.

Where there is a marked scaling up of risk (e.g. non-wetsuit swims, long distance swims, high percentage of novice/inexperienced swimmers, tides and currents) the water safety

arrangements should take this into consideration and, most likely, increase the level of resources.

Example: In an open sea swim with mixed ability swimmers, some of whom may not be wearing wetsuits, it may be appropriate to increase the safety resources and reduce the distance between safety craft and swimmers. Conversely, for a swim taking place in the closed environment of a dock with experienced swimmers and easy/quick access to land based support around the course it may be appropriate to reduce the level of safety craft (while maintaining ratio requirements). The most effective cover in the majority of, if not all circumstances, is likely to be provided by:

A mix of water-based and land-based safety cover. Land-based cover focusing on the swimmer entry and exit points and possible "spotter" support around the course. Water-based safety cover to provide supervision around the course. A combination of engine-powered and human-powered craft on the water.

For each swim the safety cover should be organised, resourced and competent

to provide effective supervision in the prevailing conditions. When assessing the level and positioning of safety cover some key questions should be considered:

- How will we know if a swimmer gets into difficulty at any point on the course?
- How will we ensure that swimmers all follow the correct course?
- If anyone gets into difficulty how can we provide support quickly to prevent the situation from worsening?
- If a swimmer sinks can the safety cover get to them?
- If there is a serious incident how will we recover the swimmer(s) to land quickly?
- If a safety craft is dealing with an incident will there be sufficient cover to maintain appropriately competent cover for the remaining swimmers still in the water?
- If other activities are taking place on the water at the same time as swimming how will we ensure that other water users are aware that swimmers are in the water and where they will be swimming?
- Do we have the correct ratios of craft to swimmers?
- What communication method will be used.

Safety Personnel

- Coaches
- Lifeguard
- First aider
- Spotters
- Kayakers/paddleboarder
- Motorised craft operators

- Able to use their equipment and the equipment available at the facility correctly and safely.
- Trained/briefed in the safety procedures applicable to their role; and
- Able to communicate for assistance.

- Recover an unconscious casualty and transfer them to land-based support. The quicker this can happen the greater the probability of a successful outcome.

- Maintain a designated swimming area and minimise the potential for interaction with other water users.

- Identify swimmers: a) in the event of an incident IF their particular needs may influence the safety response; or b) to highlight swimmers that may require support at the swim exit point.

There are a number of principles that underpin effective safety cover, including the ability to:

- Maintain constant and proactive surveillance of all swimmers over the whole course (NOTE: Consideration should be given to the length of duty spells as fatigue compromises both concentration and performance. In difficult conditions, e.g. cold, wet weather the duty spells may need to be shortened).

- Guide and interact with swimmers.

- Raise the alarm and communicate with others.

- Identify and respond quickly to a swimmer getting into difficulty and provide initial support to prevent the situation from worsening (as a guideline the initial support should aim to reach the swimmer within one minute).

A coach should NOT provide a dual role of coach and safety personnel. They can act as an additional safety person, but only over and above the minimum requirements. Best practice safe supervision is about having sufficient cover to spot and come to the aid of someone who appears to be getting into difficulty before it becomes an emergency, i.e. that they should be proactive, rather than just wait for an alarm to be raised and respond to that alarm.

COMPETENCIES

Anyone undertaking a safety role should be:

- Skilled and knowledgeable in the environment they are operating in. It is essential that all operators of safety craft, whether powered or not, have an appropriate level of experience, are well briefed and drilled and mindful of how they approach swimmers. Being approached by powered craft in particular, can be an intimidating experience for a swimmer.
- Physically fit to undertake their role and be able to self-rescue if necessary.
- Appropriately clothed and equipped, including food and drink, for the prevailing conditions.

Monitoring Swimmers

The ability to account for all swimmers is fundamental to the safety arrangements. As a minimum this should include a method of accurately counting swimmers into the water at the start of the swim and back out again at the end. However, accounting for swimmers should also include the ability to quickly identify:

- Any swimmers who are removed from the water into a safety boat.
- Any swimmers who retire from the swim and leave the water at any point other than the recognised end point.

For swimmers who may require closer supervision (e.g. medical issue, first-time, very nervous) the use of a specifically coloured swim hat can provide a discreet method of identifying them to the safety cover.

Communication

Effective and efficient communication underpins a coordinated, timely and appropriate response to incidents. The communication plan should include both land-based and water-based safety cover and a back-up system in the event of the primary method of communication failing. The nature of the environment and activity is likely

to limit the effectiveness and/or suitability of mobile telephones and the use of radios may not be practical or affordable. The use of visual signals and audible signals e.g. whistle, can be particularly effective for rapid communication and identifying the location of an incident.

Medical Support and Equipment

All open water swimming activities should have plans to deal with incidents requiring medical intervention. 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. Identifying the appropriate level of medical support should be based on a similar assessment of the risks used to determine the level of safety support, ideally with the input of someone with a medical background and an understanding of the risks of open water swimming.

Safety Craft

When identifying appropriate safety craft it is important to understand that whilst there are various engine-powered and human-powered craft available not all are suitable for use as safety craft and that each type may be appropriate in certain situations but not in others.

In broad terms: Powered craft are best suited to recover casualties from the water and transport them as quickly as possible to the point of transfer to the land-based support. (NOTE: A minimum of two people are required – one to drive and one to recover and support casualty). Human-powered craft are more suited to guiding and closely interacting with swimmers and providing initial support to casualties up to the point of transfer to the powered support craft. In both cases the competency of the operator is as important as the suitability of the craft. Similarly,

any land-based safety support must be competent and appropriately equipped to fulfil their function. It is important that any craft performing a safety role is not given additional duties that compromise their primary function. Other areas to consider:

- Is there access for a sufficient number of suitable safety boats and paddle craft?
- If appropriate safety craft are not available at the venue where can they be sourced? Does the venue impose any restrictions on craft that need to be taken into account?
- Does the course design eliminate or minimise the need for powered safety craft to cross the swim line? If powered craft do need to cross the swim line what arrangements can be put in place to manage the crossings safely?

→ Craft access and egress. Is there a dedicated emergency landing point where casualties can be transferred to the land-based support? It is recommended that the emergency landing point is located away from where swimmers enter or exit the water.

→ Is the safety support personnel competent to provide effective cover in the prevailing conditions?

→ Check for evidence of experience and competence.

If the ability to provide effective safety cover as detailed in the Normal Operating Plan is compromised swimming should be cancelled or suspended until the conditions improve and/or appropriate resources are available e.g. mist or fog reducing visibility, safety boat breakdown.

Managing Swimmers

PRE-SWIM PREPARATION

Helping swimmers to prepare properly for the demands of an open water swim before they enter the water can make a significant contribution to their safety as well as their enjoyment. This is particularly important for swimmers who may never have experienced open water swimming before. If providing written information it should be kept as clear and simple as possible.

Pre-swim safety briefing – ideally at a location where they can clearly see the swim course. The swim should not commence until the safety briefing has taken place. Things to include in the briefing include:

- Weather conditions

- A description of the course route, re-group locations and tide conditions
- Water temperature
- Number of safety craft
- Any information about jellyfish/seals
- The action swimmers should take if they get into difficulty
- Encourage those that are nervous or new to open water swimming to start slowly if they are unsure of their swimming ability relative to others

MINIMISING STRESS

Research into open water swimming-related fatalities around the world

has identified Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD), rather than drowning, as the likely cause of death in the majority of cases. One possible mechanism of SCD in open water swimming, referred to as Autonomic Conflict (AC), suggests that anxiety, stress, anger and over-competitiveness combined with water entering the nose and throat and a requirement for breath holding may produce a fatal arrhythmia in susceptible people. Whilst it is not possible to completely mitigate feelings of anxiety and stress experienced by individual swimmers there are some practical steps that can be taken to reduce them. These include but are not limited to:

- Acclimatisation: giving all swimmers the opportunity to acclimatise

to the water temperature and regulate their breathing in a defined area before swimming.

- Controlling the group size: limiting the number of swimmers entering the water at any one time to prevent overcrowding, reduces stress on nervous swimmers in particular and enabling the safety team to reach swimmers more easily if necessary.
- Providing sufficient space: to prevent overcrowding so that swimmers can find clear water more easily.
- Separating groups: reducing the likelihood of faster swimmers swimming into and over slower swimmers.
- Increasing the number of safety craft at the start of the swim where stress levels, confusion and turbulent water are likely to be at their greatest.
- Buddy system. Clubs could introduce a buddy system for new swimmers by pairing them up with an experienced swimmer who is familiar with the swim route.
- Clubs can ask new members or weaker swimmers to use a personal swim buoy for safety and so they can be easily identified.

Data collated from the Great Swim series (UK), referenced by British Triathlon has identified that the greatest number of interactions with swimmers (from simply giving reassurance to removing swimmers from the water) occur in the first 400 metres of the swim. The vast majority are stress/confidence related.

WETSUITS

Wetsuits provide insulation against the cold, improving cold water tolerance

and extending the time a swimmer is able to remain (comfortably) in the water. They also increase buoyancy so that, even when static, swimmers float. These two qualities can help reduce some risks to swimmers but it is important that wetsuits fit well and are designed for swimming, as poorly fitting wetsuits can impair swimming ability potentially creating other issues.

Poorly fitting wetsuits can be a common source of stress and anxiety, particularly for swimmers who are new to open water swimming. If wetsuits are too tight they can restrict movement and breathing to a point where the swimmer may unzip the suit for relief causing it to flood with water. If they are not tight enough they will also flood with water. In both these cases drag is increased making swimming far more difficult as well as compromising the insulating properties of the wetsuit. Also, it is not uncommon for inexperienced open water swimmers to put their wetsuit on back to front creating similar problems. Basic wetsuit checks prior to swimmers entering the water can help identify potential problems before issues arise. The main things to check are:

- That the wetsuit fits snugly – particularly around the neck where a good seal helps prevent excess water entering the suit.
- There is a comfortable fit from crotch to shoulder so that arm reach and flexibility are not restricted.
- For full body suits: Correct length in arm and legs without excess material being gathered up that will increase drag.

It is also worth highlighting to inexperienced open water swimmers that a well-fitting wetsuit may feel

tight and restrictive when dry but they will feel more comfortable once wet and that they should not unzip/try to remove their wetsuit in the water.

DISABILITY SWIMMING

The course design for disabled swimming need not differ from the club's usual course. The main considerations should be on the entry and exit arrangements bearing in mind the needs of:

- Wheelchair users;
- Swimmers with prosthetic limbs;
- Swimmers who require crutches;
- Visually impaired swimmers.

Entering the water should be done in a safe and controlled area, ideally from a slipway or pontoon that provides an even, consistent surface and enters into deep water. The area should be wide enough to accommodate the swimmer and their helper(s). The requirements at the swim exit are similar in terms of the underfoot conditions and width but the mechanics of swimmers exiting the water varies depending on the nature of the disability, as well as the individual. Ideally, only trained water handlers should be used at the swim exit, particularly for swimmers who require lifting from the water – personal handlers who have no experience or training should not be used to avoid injury to either themselves or their swimmer. The best way to plan for an individual's needs are to ask them what they have done previously or how they would like to approach it and combine this with experienced water handlers.

Water Quality

Water quality should be tested regularly to ensure it remains safe and suitable for swimming. Whilst water quality at open water sites can be influenced by a number of different factors the most likely cause of ill-health amongst swimmers is from microbial contamination. As water quality testing can only provide a snapshot of what is present at the time of testing it is preferable to build a profile by testing

regularly to help identify if there is an underlying problem. Further advice and guidance should be sought, initially from the local authority before starting open water swimming as they should be able to give guidance on the frequency of the testing.

Testing of water quality should include tests for acidity (pH), evidence of blue-green algae and other water-borne

pathogens. In a managed facility, testing should be carried out by the facility on a regular basis, the coach should clarify this is the case and that checks have been done. In a non-managed facility, the coach/organiser may need to organise testing. Coaches should be aware of external factors, such as heavy rain which for example may wash farm chemicals/waste off into a lake and may affect water quality

or visibility. Issues such as algae are more common later in the summer or after periods of warm/dry weather. Whilst water quality tests provide an indication of the suitability of a venue for open water swimming they do not mean that there is a complete absence of potential pathogens. It should be noted that there is always a risk when swimming in open water. There are simple practices that triathletes should be advised to adopt to minimise risk of infections further:

- Cover all cuts and abrasions, however minor, with plasters or other appropriate medical barriers. You should not consider swimming if you have deep cuts.
- Wash hands in fresh water before eating after you have swum.
- Take a full shower at the earliest opportunity and also wash out any kit used.
- Try NOT to ingest any water whilst swimming.
- Report any ill symptoms experienced after an open water swim to a doctor, as soon as possible, stating that you have participated in an open water swimming session/event. The speed of response to any water borne infection is important. Often the symptoms presented are flu like and this can delay diagnosis and treatment.

WATER TEMPERATURE

Both high and low water temperatures can put significant stress on swimmers putting their health at risk. Training sessions may not be as physically demanding as race situations, and athletes may cool more in training than race scenarios. In training sessions elapsed time in the water should be considered in conjunction with water temperature, in a similar way that distance and temperature are considered for races.

Factors Affecting Water Temperature:

- Most large open bodies of water will often have large variances in

- water temperature - warm in the shallows, cold in deeper water.
- Air temperature - water will not heat up as quickly as land, and can have huge variances e.g. 25' air temp with 7' water temp.
- Sea temperature does not rise until late summer, often still being very cold into May and June.
- Other weather factors such as wind and rain can have a significant impact on participant comfort levels.

COLD WATER

In cold water there is a common misconception that Hypothermia (when the core body temperature falls below 35°C from a normal near-constant of 36.5°C to 37.5°C) is the major risk. In reality the bigger risk to swimmers are effects of physiological changes that occur to the body prior to the onset of hypothermia which include:

COLD SHOCK

Swimmers can experience a cold shock response for about a minute after entering the water. Rapid skin cooling leads to a gasp reflex and possible hyperventilation. Panic can exacerbate the situation and potentially cause someone to drown by breathing water into the lungs if the head goes underwater or if the swimmer faints through prolonged hyperventilation. Another cold shock response is that the blood vessels narrow (vasoconstriction) to preserve heat in the body core and protect the major organs. As a result the heart has to work much harder to pump the same volume of blood around the body. For swimmers with an underlying heart problem this additional workload can cause the heart to go into cardiac arrest.

PERIPHERAL COOLING

Vasoconstriction, described above, decreases blood flow to the limbs. As a result the limbs begin to cool affecting the ability of the nerves and muscles to function as well as normal which ultimately leads to a loss of controlled

and coordinated movement and the ability for the swimmer to maintain an airway by keeping their head above water (known as swim failure).

Cold water tolerance in individuals varies depending on a number of factors including:

- Age,
- Body physiology,
- Health,
- Ability to generate body heat.

Swimmers can improve their cold water tolerance by regularly swimming in cold water.

WARM WATER

Hyperthermia is an elevated body temperature which occurs when the body produces or absorbs more heat than it can dissipate, leading to heat stroke and unconsciousness. Given the climate, problems associated with cold water swimming are generally perceived to be the more significant risk when swimming in Ireland. However, the use of wetsuits can increase the risk of hyperthermia, particularly when the air temperature is warm and swimmers stand around for prolonged periods in zipped up wetsuits waiting to swim.

To help mitigate the risks posed to swimmers by water temperature and weather conditions consider:

Acclimatisation: Encouraging swimmers to acclimatise to the water temperature

Swimmer Assessment: Having well-briefed safety personnel that are able to recognise the signs of a swimmer getting into difficulty.

Emergency Action Plan

Key actions from the RA should be used to inform and develop the EAP for open water sessions

In the event of an emergency it is essential to ensure the response is coordinated to optimise the likelihood of a successful outcome. Things to consider and ideally rehearse might include:

- How will the land-based support team be made aware of the incident and the potential seriousness?
- Where will the casualty be taken to by the safety boat – is there a dedicated landing point close to medical facilities with sufficient working space for the land-based support to operate?
- Who will direct/coordinate the transfer from the safety boat to the land?
- Who will transfer the casualty from the boat to the land and how will they do it?
- Who will transfer the casualty to the medical facility and what route will be taken?
- Who will contact the emergency services for further support?

SUGGESTED CLUB OPEN WATER SESSION RULES

The following list is a suggested list of recommendations to be given at club based coached session, this is non-exhaustive but is included as a guide to the type of provisions that should be made:

- No entry into the water will be allowed until all safety arrangements are in place and the safety officer/session leader has indicated that it is safe to do so.
- Note this band is higher than race scenarios and the coach should always consider the safety element of wearing a wetsuit.
- Brightly coloured swim hats must be worn by swimmers.
- Swimmers will use a defined course set by the session leader/coach – using landmarks where buoys etc. are not available.
- Swimmers are to swim parallel to the bank/shore where possible.

- Safety cover will be provided at all sessions and this will not be below the required minimum standard identified in the venue risk assessment.
- Before every session a pre-swim briefing will be given. This will provide clear guidance on the session, the group structure, the course to be swum, and information on what to do if a swimmer experiences difficulty.
- Sessions will not stray into water space used for other activities.
- All sessions will finish at the allotted time.
- Wetsuits must be worn always, except in unusually warm conditions, e.g. optional between 20-24 degrees in training sessions. Note this band is higher than race scenarios and the coach should always consider the safety element of wearing a wetsuit.

GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANTS

The club should create guidelines for participants. These can be sent out prior to the session or posted on the club forum. These could include:

- Location and time of session.
- Access to completed RA and EAP if requested.
- What ability level the session is suitable for and what to expect in an open water session for beginners.
- Structure of the session if working from a session plan.
- Who will be coaching/leading/facilitating the session.
- What safety support will be present.
- Rules for the session, for example wetsuits are required, club membership is compulsory, and how they must sign in and out.
- Participants who have relevant medical conditions must be willing to provide medical information to the individual running the session which must be stored confidentially but accessible at training session in case of emergency.
- Participants must provide an emergency contact.

Note: Both relevant medical information and emergency contact information can be collected at the start of the year and updated when necessary.

ON THE DAY:

- The coach/leader should ensure those with medical conditions have provided any relevant medical information and everyone has supplied an emergency contact(s).
- Briefing of safety crew and participants.
- The coach/leader should ensure that everyone knows their role in the event of an emergency.
- The coach/leader should provide sign in sheets/digital sign on option in advance.
- Groups should be screened and those new to open water identified.
- If possible clubs should try and operate a buddy system for beginners to open water swimming or use swim buoys.
- Give the group a clear direction of where to enter and exit the water, what direction to swim any tidal or safety information relevant to that area.
- Protocol if they or someone else needs assistance.
- Spotter on shore with hi viz, whistle, and phone. Add additional spotters where necessary. Consider if one spotter needs to leave urgently or call for emergency assistance.
- All Participants should be counted in and out of the water.
- Lifeguard and first aider present.
- Safety craft: The ratio of human powered safety craft to adult participants is 1:20.

Coaching Guidance

A coach should not take part in their own sessions; however, as coach you should consider the best place to coach from:

- From bank/shore;
- From pontoon;
- In a boat or canoe (only if they are competent, a coach who cannot control the boat or canoe can become a hazard themselves);
- In the water - this would only happen where the water is shallow around the bank and the swimmers have to walk out to be able to swim.

The coach should position where they can stand up comfortably, i.e. no more than waist deep

When selecting a position to coach from the coach must always consider their own safety and that of the participants. A coach should consider how they will observe their athletes and control the group, if they are at distance from the coach this will be challenging, and the risks to the athletes will increase.

POST SESSION

Record any incidents and review RA and EAP if necessary.

Ask for feedback from attendees regarding how they think the session went and if they felt safe.

Useful Water Safety Contacts

[Water Safety Ireland](#)

[Lifeguarded beach directory](#)

[Canoeing Ireland - Rescue award](#)

[Water Safety Ireland local contacts](#)

[Lifeguard Awards](#)

[NI Direct – bathing water quality](#)

[waterlevel.ie](#)

[Royal National Lifeboat Institution](#)

[Waterways Ireland](#)

[Local Authority Water Safety Development Officers](#)

[Irish Coast Guard](#)

[Daera NI Water Profiles](#)

open road cycle sessions

Closed Road Preparatory Sessions

These sessions should cover:

- Basic open road skills and etiquette: cycling in a group, road safety, getting your bottle, signalling, cornering,
- getting on and out of cleats, how to approach a roundabout as a group.
- How to change a tube.
- Equipment required.
- M-Checks (bike safety check).
- Appropriate hand signals that the club uses.
- Cycle skills - What the protocols are if someone gets lost/injured.

Equipment

Any bikes used within a coached session should be fit for the purpose of the session. For example, this may mean that a bike that is acceptable for a slow-moving skills session in a playground may not be suitable for a closed road session with larger groups moving at speed.

Within competitive triathlon, helmets are a mandatory requirement. TI

qualified coaches should, within reason, insist upon the wearing of helmets within coached sessions. The only possible exception may be when the wearing of a cycle helmet may not be compatible with a disability requirement or for religious or faith reasons. In these occasions the cyclist may be permitted to participate but the ultimate decision will rest with the coach who conducts the

session and be based on a RA for that session. Helmets should be:

- Undamaged and in good condition.
- Correct size for the rider.
- An appropriate quality standard.
- Worn correctly, namely, the right way around, covering the forehead, shouldn't move around on the head, it should not be possible to move chin strap over the chin.

Risk Assessment

Areas to consider:

- Avoiding busy roads, or areas where other events are taking place.
- Giving plenty of warning to horse riders, and reducing speed and passing wide of horses.
- Avoiding riding in large groups (greater than 8), where necessary split larger groups into smaller groups, each with a leader, and ensure sufficient gaps between groups to allow other vehicles to overtake safely.
- Seek to give feedback to riders in a safe static situation, e.g. pull off the main carriageway into a car park or lay-by where the risk of injury or accident is significantly reduced, and participants and coach can give full attention to each other and the coaching points without having to overly consider safety implications.
- Support needed to ensure all groups are visible at all times, which is why it's advisable to have a second coach or experienced athlete following the group.
- Pace to be controlled at all times and within limits of the cyclist's capabilities.
- As with all sessions group control and emergency procedures should be in place along with Emergency First Aid provision.
- The coach also needs to consider logistics and safety of moving the group from a start/meeting position to the training area. This can be effectively managed as a non-coached group ride out to the training location.
- Sessions should be cancelled if the weather is poor, road conditions have changed adversely (e.g. excessive mud, flooding or ice), traffic on the route is heavier than expected.
- Have an appropriate plan in place in case of session cancellation.
- Industrial estates outside of normal working hours are usually a good option for sessions of this nature.
- Country lanes can have limited traffic but should be carefully reviewed. Issues include vehicles travelling faster than expected, limited passing places, farm traffic, livestock & mud on road.

Guidelines For Participants

The club should create guidelines for participants in these sessions to be sent out prior to sessions. These include:

- Location and time of session.
 - Completed RA and EAP.
 - Route plan for the session.
 - Whether or not there is a coach present.
 - What ability level the session is suitable for.
 - Structure of the session if working from a session plan.
 - Rules for the session, for example attendees must carry water, wear hiz, etc.
 - Participants who have relevant medical conditions must be willing to provide medical information to the individual running the session which must be stored confidentially but accessible at training sessions.
 - Participants must provide an emergency contact.
- ON THE DAY:**
- The session coach/leader/Tri Leader should ensure everyone in attendance has provided medical information and an emergency contact(s).
 - Bike safety checks performed by each person prior to beginning.
 - Coach/leader should carry a phone.
 - The coach/leader should provide sign in sheets/digital sign on option in advance.
 - The group should be screened and those new to open road cycling identified.
 - If possible, have a support car.

juniors (under 18) training in adult sessions

Junior athletes can take part in adult sessions as long as the athlete is capable of completing the session or a modified version of the session. Distances and intensity should be appropriate to age and ability.

SAFEGUARDING

Any Coach/Leader/Volunteer working with athletes under the age of 18 on a regular and continuous basis, must undertake the following prior to beginning this role.

- [Garda Vetting/Access NI](#) through Triathlon Ireland.
- Signed Code of conduct – [Form 8/Form 10](#).
- Attended Safeguard 1 course/ Safeguarding Children and Young People in Sport

The following should also be considered:

- The coaches are happy to coach children in a mixed environment, they are properly qualified and have had the necessary safeguarding checks carried out.
- That the adult participants are happy for children over the age of 14 to take part in the session. This change will affect the dynamics of the session.
- If the club is not a junior club this will change the type of club from adult to junior/adult. The club will then need to meet the requirements for a junior club including appointing a club Children's Officer. [Further details here](#). TI can support with this set up.
- Parents are happy to provide informed consent for their child to take part in the session.
- Clubs must complete the Safeguarding tab of the risk assessment document as part of the overall risk assessment for sessions which include juniors.

Either a parent/guardian or someone acting in locus parentis should attend sessions and take responsibility for the junior as soon as the session is over. This person should either take part (eg. cycle) or be on the side lines. Absent Parent Consent Form ([Form 11a](#)) should be submitted to the club children's officer if the parent/guardian is giving responsibility to another adult for their child during the session.

After a few sessions the situation should be reviewed in consultation with the children's officer, the child, the parent/guardian and coach to ensure everyone is satisfied with the arrangement. The needs of the child are paramount and any decisions should be in the best interests of the child. The process may differ from club to club and TI will consult with clubs where necessary.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- [Local Authorities ROI](#)
- [Local Sports Partnerships ROI](#)
- [Local Councils NI](#)

POLICIES

- [Safeguarding Policy documents](#)
- [Garda Vetting/Access NI application steps](#)

GLOSSARY

- TI** - Triathlon Ireland
- RA** - Risk Assessment
- EAP** - Emergency Action Plan
- NOP** - Normal Operating Procedure
- CPD** - Continued Professional Development

FORMS

- [Garda Vetting Form](#)
- [Access NI Form](#)
- [Parental Consent Form 11](#)
- [Absent Parent Form 11a](#)
- [Junior Accident/Incident Report Form](#)
- [Adult Accident/Incident Report Form](#)
- Coaches/Leaders Code of Conduct - [New Coach Leader: Form 8](#)
- Coaches/Leaders Code of Conduct - Existing Coach Leader: [Form 10](#) - Submitted annually
- [Risk Assessment](#)
- [Emergency Action Plan](#)