



Operating Guidelines for a Successful Public Pool and Spa Reopening During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By the PHTA Recreational Water Quality Committee

FOLLOWING THE ONSET of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, many public swimming pools and spas were required to temporarily close throughout the country as part of the public health effort to limit the community spread of COVID-19. While the illness continues to be a tremendous public health

challenge, it is also well recognized that swimming pools offer significant public health benefits.

Reopening any aquatic facility is not without some risk to staff and members/guests. Each facility must decide whether opening under the specific constraints of a given order with continued guidance from the

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC) is technically, logistically and financially feasible.

While properly treated pool water is not considered a vehicle for transmission of the COVID-19 virus, the risk of transmission remains present at any place of work, and any recreation facility, and is a greater risk at indoor facilities. Therefore, social distancing must be maintained at all times between staff, between guests and between staff and guests. Hand washing, sanitization and regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and surfaces are equally essential.

The following is a brief summary of aquatic facility related recommendations from the U.S. CDC, state and city health departments as well as the Pool and Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA). All venues should be familiar

RISKS OF COVID-19 FROM RECREATIONAL WATER

The U.S. CDC and PHTA are not aware of any scientific reports of COVID-19 infections through contact with properly maintained recreational water in swimming pools, hot tubs, or water playgrounds (U.S. CDC, 2020a). Therefore, proper operation and maintenance of disinfectant levels in the recreational water in accordance with PHTA's ANSI/APSP/ICC-11 2019 American National Standard for Water Quality in Public Pools and Spas is essential.

with and adhere to state and local requirements and U.S. CDC guidance.

As with other coronaviruses, COVID-19 is spread predominantly through respiratory droplets from infected individuals that land in the mouths or noses of others or when inhaled into the lungs. The recommendations that follow are based on this knowledge.

MITIGATING THE RISK: OVERVIEW

Facilities should develop a compliance plan, which will address the following:

- Determining overall and zone/region capacity based on distancing and state and local requirements
- Employee screening
- Guest screening
- Identifying shifts and cleaning times
- Where and when masks are required
- Enforcement of distancing and mask usage when required
- Signage
- Cleaning and infection control policies and procedures should be defined.
- Response when a staff or guest infection is identified
- Provide communication to the public to help promote adherence to COVID-19 safety measures.

GENERAL OPERATING RECOMMENDATIONS

The following general precautions by the U.S. CDC (2020b) apply to ALL public facilities and places of work:

- Stay home if you are infected or suspect that you may be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Maintain at least 6 feet of distance from individuals you do not live with.
- Wear appropriate and effective face masks except where specifically exempted (when swimming or eating).
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue (or inside of an elbow).
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are unavailable.

A. Recommendations for Workplace Policies and Practices

Public pools and spas are places of work and should adhere to all applicable

workplace rules from state and local authorities as well as guidance from the U.S. CDC. These include:

- Determining maximum number of employees, particularly non-certified staff.
- Identifying employees that are able to or should work remotely, based on job function, as well as at-risk factors such as age and health (Note: Employers must also remain compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.)
- Conduct entry health screenings on employees, which consist of symptom questionnaires (cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fever or chills), exposure to others with positive tests or symptoms, and recent travel. Temperature checks may also be performed (temperature should not exceed 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit).
- Use of appropriate face masks except for on-duty lifeguards. If an employee is unable to wear a mask, consider reasonable accommodations, such as working remotely.
- Provide adequate supplies of necessary equipment, including masks.
- Ensure distancing between employees (while working or in break areas) and between employees and guests. Install plexiglass shields where necessary.

B. Determining Usage and Capacity

- Determine operational limits and restrictions currently in place by local health departments.
- Determine number of bathers that can be accommodated based on 6 feet of distancing. This may limit capacity to 50% or less in some locales.
- Establish capacities in each pool/spa and by zone and lane.
- Lap pools may require greater limitations.
- Spas require further limitations based on size.
- Consider closing or placing further limits on slides and other features.

C. Equipment

- Provide face masks for employees and guests who need one.
- Provide hand sanitizing stations throughout facility.

D. Pool Maintenance and Operation

- Continued/enhanced monitoring of pool chemistry.
- Continued monitoring of equipment (including HVAC for indoor venues).

E. Signage

- Post rules, restrictions and screening requirements on web and social media sites.
- Post additional and CONSPICUOUS signage prior to entry and throughout facility addressing:
 1. Screening;
 2. Distancing;
 3. Capacity;
 4. Use of face masks by all guests over two years of age;
 5. Washing and sanitizing; and
 6. Obeying all staff instructions.

F. Compliance/Enforcement

- Consider separate entrances and exits.
- Inform and empower staff:
 1. Consider implementing shifts and/or reservations for pool use;
 2. Consider further limits on lap pools;
 3. Change deck layouts and other areas surrounding the pool to ensure that the standing and seating areas can support physical distancing requirements; and
 4. Provide physical cues or guides (for example, lane lines in the water), signs and visual cues (for example, tape on the decks or floors) to ensure that swimmers stay at least 6 feet apart, both in and out of the water.
- Employees should be designated and empowered for monitoring and ensuring:
 1. Capacities;
 2. Distancing; and
 3. Use of masks except when in pool or eating.
 4. These functions cannot be assigned to on-duty lifeguards.

G. Recommended Measures for Infection Control

- Monitor and document water chemistry and equipment.
- Limit shared objects, such as chairs and table (consider requiring guests to bring their own).
- Establish a cleaning and disinfection plan for frequently touched surfaces and objects.

1. Cleaning/disinfection should be conducted using a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved disinfectant from the List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus (COVID-19). The list can be found at: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19>
2. Consider shifts/time slots to allow for clearing of pool and venue to allow cleaning.
- The following surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected frequently (hourly and/or between use is recommended):
 1. Handrails/slides
 2. Lounge chairs, tabletops
 3. Restrooms and showers
 4. Door handles, handwashing stations, diaper changing stations and showers
 5. Kickboards and pool noodles
 6. Common-use facilities (e.g. lockers)
- Ensure adequate supplies of masks, soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, paper towels, tissues and trash cans that are available to visitors.
- Visitors should bring their own towels to the pool and should not share towels with those outside of their household.
- Confine food vending and distribution to designated areas with properly spaced seating.
 1. Visitors should not share any food or beverages with non-household members to reduce the risk for infection transmission.
- It is recommended that water fountains or water coolers be shut off and not be used.
- For indoor facilities:
 1. Ensure ventilation systems of indoor spaces are operating properly.
 2. Consider further restrictions on capacity and food and beverage distribution and consumption.
 3. Increase introduction and circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to staff or visitors.
 4. Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading

the facility's air filters to the highest efficiency level possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.

H. Strategies for Addressing a COVID-19 Illness Occurrence

- An infected person still at facility needs to be isolated and then safely removed from the facility.
- Immediately close all areas where symptomatic individual may have been.
 1. This may require closing entire venue.
 2. Avoid using the areas until cleaning and disinfection can be performed.
 3. It is recommended to wait a minimum of 24 hours before attempting to clean the area.
- Notify local health officials, staff and visitors, if possible, of any case of COVID-19 while maintaining confidentiality in accordance with HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act).
- Inform any individuals who had close contact with the person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms (follow U.S. CDC guidance).

I. General Communication to the Public

- Post information on websites and other platforms.
- Post signage at each public entrance of the pool facility to inform pool users to stay home if they are ill or have symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
- Display signs throughout venue regarding:
 1. Capacities by pool/spa, zone or lane;
 2. Distancing;
 3. Hand washing and sanitization; and
 4. Compliance with all staff instructions.
- Signage should also be posted encouraging all visitors to wash their hands often or use sanitizer upon entry into the pool facility.

NOTE: Regarding vaccination, at this time the best recommendation is to continue to wear a face mask and

follow public health guidelines until further notice. A vaccine may have the capability to stop symptoms, but infection may still occur. This means a person who is fully vaccinated may still be an asymptomatic carrier of the virus and spread it to others.

The above represents general guidance. Facilities should be familiar with ALL state and local rules and guidance as well as the recommendations of the U.S. CDC. Some of this information is provided in the references below.

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ALL FACILITIES AND INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS ARE ADVISED TO SEEK THEIR OWN LEGAL COUNSEL, AND/OR SPECIFIC GUIDANCE FROM SAFETY EXPERTS AND THE APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES.

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