

## Safety Activity Checkpoint

### Swimming

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required  
First-Aider and Lifeguard Required

**Council Approval:** Required

**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. Some Girl Scout camps have places to swim; backyard, hotel, cruise ship, and water park pools are possibilities, too. You can also visit national and regional parks that allow swimming.

Consult a local parks and recreation department, YMCA, or American Red Cross for swimming lessons.

#### Learn More:

Learn swimming strokes. What is the difference between butterfly and breaststroke? How do you do a flip turn? Get some ideas at [Enjoy Swimming](#)

- Marco Polo and Find the Penny are popular swimming games, but you can make up your own, too or try these [24 Fun Swimming Pool Games](#)
- YMCA Safety Around Water: [The Y: Safety Around Water](#)
- American Red Cross lifeguard training: [Lifeguard and Water Safety Training](#)
- [USA Swimming](#)

#### Also see:

- [Swimming World](#) magazine
- Safety around water: [YMCA](#)
- [American Red Cross lifeguard training](#)
- [USA Swimming](#)

## Making Activities Accessible

In order to make your activity accessible to girls of all abilities, it's important to communicate with all girl attendees and their caregivers to learn about and accommodate their varied support needs. For resources and information on accessible sport and adventure activities, visit [Move United](#).

### Additional Resources:

See [Move United Sports](#) to learn more about equipment, adaptations, and finding a program near you. Check out [World Para Swimming](#) to learn about inspiring swimmers of all abilities.

## Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the girls in your troop that could affect a girl's ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with girls and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all girls and their families feel comfortable that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as the proper equipment, prior experiences, and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

## Safety Activity Checkpoints

**Emergency Action Plan (EAP).** Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl or adult, missing girl, or sudden illness.

**COVID-19 Guidelines.** Review the "Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts" section in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) under the "Standard Safety Guidelines" section and be certain to consult with [GSNorCal's specific COVID-19 guidance](#). When applicable, always call ahead to the vendor, property or facility involved to check for their COVID-19 safety requirements as you prepare to take girls for this activity.

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**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 will need to recruit a lifeguard. At least one lifeguard, certified in American Red Cross Lifeguard Training or equivalent, and one watcher are present at all times. When using more than one lifeguard, lifeguards under 18 years of age may be included in the total, as long as there is 1 adult lifeguard (18-years or older) also present. Utilize Yelp, your local YMCA or Community Pool, Cabana Clubs, and Swim Schools to find a Lifeguard for your activities. See the table below for the type of lifeguard needed.

*Exception for lakes, 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 or equivalent lifeguard certification must be present.

**Identify watchers.** One dedicated adult watcher is needed for every 10 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.

### Swimming Lifeguards and Watchers Ratios

Number of Swimmers	Lifeguards	Watchers
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.

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 and/or special needs, age level and ability to follow instructions, type of swimming activity (instruction, recreation), type of swimming area, weather and water conditions, and rescue equipment available. If you are unsure whether your swimming lifeguards and watchers ratios are sufficient, contact GSNorCal’s Risk Management Team ([insurance@gsnorcal.org](mailto:insurance@gsnorcal.org)).

**Clearly identify swimming abilities.** These could be indicated, for example, with different colored wristbands to signify beginners, intermediate, and advanced swimmers. Parents/Guardians should be consulted prior to swimming event to verify girls’ abilities. The pool operator or lifeguard may have the final word in determining a girl’s abilities 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:

- A posting indicates water quality passes local 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, rocked, or heavily shelled beach waters should be chosen, if possible.
- At water parks, do not dive or run. Most waterpark 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 is 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

## Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Swimming

Swimming is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- **Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form:** Submit the online [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form](#) to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity. Gather the following information to complete this form:
  - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California, have a current background check, completed the troop chaperone course and troop driver course (if transporting girls), and completed the [California State Mandated Reporter Training](#). Troop Leaders can find this information in their [Volunteer Toolkit](#).
  - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
  - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your [MyGS Account - GSLearn](#) in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
    - The **Trip & Outdoor Advisor Course** is required for all overnight and [high-adventure activities](#).
    - The **Camp Out course** is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer than 1 night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.

- The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.
  - The **Girl Scout Small Craft Safety Training** is required before you take girls on a small craft water adventure.
- **High-Adventure Approved Vendor List:** GSNorCal troops must select a high-adventure vendor from the [High-Adventure Approved Vendor List](#), which consists of organizations that meet Girl Scouts safety and insurance requirements for the activity. For the safety of our members, before a troop uses a high-adventure site/vendor for a troop or service unit event, the council must approve the high-adventure site/vendor. This process is designed to ensure a safe experience and protect the GSNorCal and volunteer's legal interests.  
**\*\*Public and Private Pools DO NOT need to be on the approved vendor list.**