

## Swimming: Safety Activity Checkpoint

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY:

[Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form 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:

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

### Include Girls with Disabilities

Talk to girls with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations.

### Additional Resources:

See [Disabled Sports USA](#) to learn more about equipment, adaptations, and finding a program near you.

## 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 will need to recruit a lifeguard. Utilize Yelp, your local YMCA or Community Pool to find a Lifeguard for your activities. See the table below for the type of lifeguard needed.

**Identify watchers.** One dedicated 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.

### 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*
26–35	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	3*
36–50	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	4*

\*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 varying abilities, 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, be sure to contact your council.

**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, rocky, 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’s available:
- Reaching pole, rescue tube, backboard, ring buoy, throw bag with line (typically 30 feet)
- For open water, a paddle board, rescue can, kayak, or other rescue gear
- Goggles, swim cap, and/or 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.
- **High-Adventure Approved Vendor List:** GSNorCal troops/groups 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 council’s and volunteer’s legal interests.
- **Adding high-adventure facilities to the Approved Vendor List:** If your preferred vendor is not listed on the High-Adventure Approved Vendor list, please follow the simple steps in the [Volunteer Essentials](#) for adding High Adventure Vendors.