

Open Water Swimming Safety Handbook

Safety Overview

Open water swimming carries inherent risks such as cold-water shock, reduced visibility, submerged hazards, sudden depth changes, slippery banks, currents, and limited exit points. These risks align with RLSS UK and RNLI guidance. Lifeguarded venues reduce hazards but do not eliminate them.

Water Temperature Policy

Below 11°C: No sessions. 11–18°C: Wetsuits mandatory. Above 18°C: Wetsuits optional but tow float required if not used. Based on British Triathlon and Beyond Swim cold-water guidance.

Supervision & Entry

All swimmers must sign in/out, only enter when authorised by lifeguards, and must not swim without safety cover. Follow lifeguard instructions at all times.

Equipment Requirements

Mandatory: Bright hat, tow float (unless wetsuit), suitable wetsuit below 18°C.
Recommended: goggles, thermal accessories, water shoes.

Acclimatisation

Area between entry point and first buoy. New swimmers are advised to take their time getting used to the temperature conditions.

Awareness

Swimmers to be aware of others around them, particularly around buoys where people may stop. No racing permitted during general swimming sessions.

Swimmer Signals

If in trouble: attempt to stand, otherwise float on back and raise an arm. If another swimmer is in trouble: signal lifeguard, do not attempt to rescue.

Hygiene Guidance

Avoid swallowing water, shower promptly, wash all kit, cover all cuts and abrasions, wash hands before eating or drinking, and be aware of Weil's Disease symptoms within 3 weeks of swimming. If you are feeling unwell, do not swim.

Wildlife Awareness

Swans and other wildlife may be present. If a swan approaches aggressively: stop, stand and gently splash (if possible), maintain eye contact, make yourself visible, do not attempt to flee.

Emergency Procedures

On siren: exit immediately at closest bank and proceed to checkout point. Follow all staff instructions.

Water Quality & Health

Water is tested regularly. Sessions may be cancelled for algal blooms, pollution, or unsafe debris. Swimmers should report any illness after swimming.

Under-18 Supervision Policy

Ages 8–13 must be accompanied by a competent adult in the water. Ages 14–17 may swim solo only if able to complete one lap unaided. All under-18s require an on-site responsible adult.

General

Wear shoes or flip flops to the water edge, take extra care when entering and exiting the lake (slippery and rocks present), Participants must vacate Lakeside campus no later than 1030 Saturday(s) unless otherwise arranged with Lakeside manager/supervisor. UW staff have the right to refuse entry or ask any participants to leave the water on grounds of safety.