



Swimming

Sport Rules

Special Olympics





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1. GOVERNING RULES

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Swimming shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon World Aquatics rules for swimming found at <https://www.worldaquatics.com/>. World Aquatics or National Governing Body (NGB) rules shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Swimming or Article I. In such cases, the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Swimming shall apply.

An athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed with Atlanto-Axial Instability may not participate in Butterfly events, Individual Medley events, diving starts or diving.

Refer to [Sport Rules Article 1](#), for more information pertaining to Codes of Conduct, Training Standards, Medical and Safety Requirements, Divisioning, Awards, Criteria for Advancement to Higher Levels of Competition, and Unified Sports.

2. OFFICIAL EVENTS

The range of events is intended to offer competition opportunities for athletes of all abilities. Programs may determine the events offered and, if required, guidelines for the management of those events. Coaches are responsible for providing training and event selection appropriate to each athlete's skill and interest. The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics.

2.1 Fundamental Events

- 15M Assisted Swim
- 15M Flotation
- 15M Kickboard
- 15M Unassisted Swim
- 15M Walk
- 25M Assisted Swim
- 25M Flotation
- 25M Kick Board

2.2 Individual Events

- 25M Freestyle
- 50M Freestyle
- 100M Freestyle
- 200M Freestyle
- 400M Freestyle
- 800M Freestyle
- 1500M Freestyle
- 25M Backstroke
- 50M Backstroke
- 100M Backstroke
- 200M Backstroke
- 25M Breaststroke
- 50M Breaststroke
- 100M Breaststroke
- 200M Breaststroke
- 25M Butterfly
- 50M Butterfly
- 100M Butterfly



200M Butterfly
 100M Individual Medley
 200M Individual Medley
 400M Individual Medley

2.3 Relay Events

4 x 25M Freestyle Relay
 4 x 50M Freestyle Relay
 4 x 100M Freestyle Relay
 4 x 200M Freestyle Relay
 4 x 25M Medley Relay
 4 x 50M Medley Relay
 4 x 100M Medley Relay
 4 x 25M Freestyle Mixed Relay
 4 x 50M Freestyle Mixed Relay
 4 x 100M Freestyle Mixed Relay
 4 x 200M Freestyle Mixed Relay
 4 x 25M Medley Mixed Relay
 4 x 50M Medley Mixed Relay
 4 x 100M Medley Mixed Relay
 4 x 25M Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
 4 x 50M Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
 4 x 100M Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
 4 x 200M Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
 4 x 25M Medley Unified Sports Relay
 4 x 50M Medley Unified Sports Relay
 4 x 100M Medley Unified Sports Relay

3. RULES OF COMPETITION

The technical rules of competition are noted in the World Aquatics rules found at <https://www.worldaquatics.com/>. Special Olympics Programs may substitute their local NGB rules. World Aquatics rules will be used for all multi-Program events. Exceptions to these rules are listed below.

3.1 All Events

- 3.1.1 The Meet Referee, in cooperation with the Games Director, shall have the authority to adjust these rules on a case-by-case basis for the safety and well being of the athletes. The Meet Referee may intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that the appropriate regulations are observed, and shall adjudicate all protests related to the competition in progress.
- 3.1.2 The Meet Referee shall have full control and authority over all officials, approve their assignments and instruct them regarding all Special Olympics features or regulations related to the competitions. He/she shall enforce all rules and decisions of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules and World Aquatics rules and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meet, the final settlement of which is not otherwise covered by these rules.
- 3.1.3 For all events, sufficient numbers of certified swimming officials shall be appointed (including the referee, timers and judges).
- 3.1.4 Swimmers who have a hearing or vision impairment may apply, at registration, for an 'A' Exception Code allowing them to have an assistant present on pool deck during the start.



Vision impaired swimmers can also apply, at registration, for a 'T' Exception Code allowing them to have a Tapper.

- 3.1.5 No competitor shall be permitted to use or wear any device or swimsuit that may aid his/her speed, buoyancy (except flotation events) or endurance during a competition such as webbed gloves, flippers, fins, power bands, or adhesive substances, etc.). The use of technology and automated data collection devices is permissible for the sole purpose of collecting data. Automated devices shall not be utilized to transmit data, sounds, or signals to the swimmer and may not be used to aid their speed. Goggles may be worn.
 - 3.1.5.1 As a consequence of injury, it is permissible to tape no more than one or two fingers or toes. Any other kind of tape on the body is not permitted unless approved by the Referee or other designated person.
- 3.1.6 Swimmers may be assisted from the water upon request.
- 3.1.7 Starts may be from the starting block, beside the starting block or from in-water. For in-water starts the athlete shall place one hand on the end of the pool or hold the starting block with one hand. Two hands shall be used for backstroke starts.
- 3.1.8 It is allowable that swimmers who have epilepsy should wear a piece of equipment to discreetly alert the lifeguard in the event of a seizure.

3.2 Equipment

- 3.2.1 Swimwear must conform with the current World Aquatics rules. An exception may be granted by the Technical Delegate/Meet Referee/Meet Director for medical, cultural, religious or modesty reasons. These exceptions should allow male and female swimmers to cover a greater part/parts of the body but all swimwear must be made of textile material. For competition all applications for an exception to the World Aquatics rule on swimwear must be submitted with the swimmer's competition registration.
- 3.2.2 Timing system: stop watches, electronic timing system, touch pads. If an electronic timing system is not available and 3 timekeepers per lane are assigned then no Finish Judges are required. In this instance the swimmers official time and place will be taken from the times recorded. If World Aquatics approved electronic timing systems are not available then it is recommended that World Aquatics rules relating to Management of Competitions and Timekeepers be adopted.
- 3.2.3 Flags should be located 5 meters from each end of the pool to indicate distance to the finish, especially in respect to backstroke events. Flags should not be removed during competition or training sessions.
- 3.2.4 Lap cards should be used for events of 400 meters or above.
- 3.2.5 It is recommended that lane lines be marked on the bottom of the pool in accordance with World Aquatics regulations.

3.3 Relay Events

- 3.3.1 A Mixed relay team consists of 2 male and 2 female swimmers.
- 3.3.2 Where a relay team is unable to fill a Mixed relay, the team shall compete as a Male relay
- 3.3.3 Relay swimmers should exit the pool as soon as possible following the completion of their relay leg. Relay swimmers who cannot exit the water immediately may be allowed to remain in the lane until all relays have finished so long as they do not interfere with the other swimmers or the timing equipment.



3.3.4 A swimmer remaining in the water should move a short distance away from the end of the pool, close to the lane rope but shall not obstruct a swimmer in another lane. Obstruction of a swimmer in another lane shall cause the team to be disqualified.

3.4 Fundamental Events

3.4.1 Walking and Flotation Event

3.4.1.1 Set-Up

3.4.1.1.1 There should be at least one observer for every two swimmers during competition.

3.4.1.1.2 The starting line should be marked the appropriate distance from the finish.

3.4.1.1.3 The depth of the pool should be no more than 1 meter (3.5 feet) deep for walking events.

3.4.1.2 Rules

3.4.1.2.1 For walking events, the swimmer must have at least one foot touching the bottom of the pool at all times.

3.4.1.2.2 Standing on the bottom in the racing course is allowed for flotation events for the purpose of resting but, walking on or jumping from the bottom must disqualify the competitor.

3.4.1.2.3 For flotation events, each athlete is responsible for his/her own flotation device. The device must be of the body wraparound type such that if the athlete were to not be able to hold onto the device, the device would still support the athlete with his/her face out of the water. (Flotation devices such as inner tubes, floats, or swim noodles that wrap around the arms are not acceptable for use at any time).

3.4.1.2.4 Flotation devices are only allowed in Fundamental Events where specified.

3.4.2 Unassisted Swims

3.4.2.1 Athletes must swim the full distance with no physical assistance.

3.4.2.2 The competition manager, in collaboration with the Meet Referee, may allow coaches to provide verbal encouragement and/or direction from the pool deck for these events.

3.4.2.3 Standing on the bottom in the racing course is allowed for the purpose of resting. Walking on or jumping from the bottom must disqualify the competitor.

3.4.3 15M, 25M-Kick Board

3.4.3.1 Rules of the Event

3.4.3.1.1 Start - The swimmer must be in the water with one hand placed touching the pool deck edge, or, with both hands holding the kick board with the swimmers back against the pool edge.

3.4.3.1.2 Race - Both hands should remain on the kick board at all times. The swimmer may swim in a Prone or Supine position. Arm stroking is not permissible. Standing on the bottom of the pool for the purpose of resting is permissible but no walking or jumping is permitted.

3.4.3.1.3 Finish—the finish will take place when the kick board touches the pool edge at the finish line, or when some part of the swimmers body touches the pool



edge at the finish point. The swimmer must have one hand on the board at the finish.

3.4.3.1.4 Type of Kick Board permitted:

Length – maximum length is 470 mm

Width – maximum width is 330 mm

Thickness – maximum thickness is 45 mm

Material – a material that provide appropriate flotation

3.4.4 Assisted Swims

3.4.4.1 Each athlete is responsible for having his/her own coach/assistant with them in the water. The assistant may touch, guide or direct the athlete, but may not support or assist with the athlete's forward movement.

3.4.4.2 The assistant may be in the pool or on the deck.

3.4.4.3 The athlete is allowed to use a flotation device (see specifications listed in rule 3.4.2.3)

3.4.4.4 Standing on the bottom in the racing course is allowed for the purpose of resting but, walking on or jumping from the bottom must disqualify the competitor.

3.5 Unified Sports Relay Events

3.5.1 The athlete to Unified partner ratio must be 2 athletes to 2 Unified partners in Unified Relays.

3.5.2 It is required that athletes and Unified partners are of similar age, and it is preferred that athletes and Unified partners are of similar ability. For more information on similar age and ability please see Sport Rules Article 1 Section 14.1.2

3.5.3 Swimmers on a Unified Sports relay team may be assigned to swim in any order.

3.6 Maximum Effort

3.6.1 An athlete who exceeds a time of 15 percent better than the time recorded for divisioning or a reported time shall be disqualified. This only applies to events of 25 meters and longer, with the exception of the 25M freestyle race and 25M flotation race.

3.6.2 An athlete who exceeds a time of 25 percent better than the time recorded for divisioning or a reported time shall be disqualified. This applies to the 25M freestyle race, 25M flotation race, 4 x 25M freestyle relay and shorter distance events.

3.6.3 It is the responsibility of the coach to submit an improved performance time, if the time recorded in the divisioning competition is not a true reflection of the athlete's ability.

3.6.4 An athlete who is disqualified for a violation of the Maximum Effort rule shall be presented with a participation ribbon.

3.6.5 Where a divisioning round of competition is not offered at an event the coach must have the opportunity to update a swimmers submitted time prior to the event. The coach is responsible for ensuring that all times submitted are the fastest time recorded for the swimmer at the time of submission. Competition management are responsible for setting the deadline for submission of all updated times.



3.7 Markings

- 3.7.1 During competition all swimmers shall be identified by the use of individual bib numbers. The numbers will be written vertically on the upper part of both arms where it is visible at all times. All bib numbers shall be 40mm in height and shall be written with a permanent marker.
- 3.7.2 During competition exception codes shall be identified on the swimmers arms. The code will be written vertically below the bib number on the upper part of both arms, where it is visible at all times. The exception codes shall be 40mm in height and shall be written with a permanent marker. Exception codes are used where a swimmer cannot comply with the correct swimming rules for race starts, cultural, health or safety reasons.
- 3.7.3 The list of Exception Codes is:
- A = Assistant required poolside, which could be for hearing impaired, visual impaired, support and guidance.
 - B = Sitting on starting block for start
 - C = Sitting on concourse for start
 - E = Unable to grip handle/s with hand/s in Backstroke
 - H = Hearing impaired swimmer who will require a Strobe Light
 - L = Swimmer needs to be in a side lane for medical, confidence reasons
 - S = Standing start on concourse
 - T = Assistant required for a visual impaired swimmer who uses a Tapper
 - U = Swimwear exception for medical, cultural, religious, modesty reason/s
 - W = Water start
 - Z = Medical alert

4. PERSONNEL

Where possible all Officials (including the referee, timers and judges) should be certified by the respective governing body. Where this is not possible, all Officials must receive appropriate training.

4.1 Event Director/Meet Director/Games Director

4.1.1 Responsibilities of Event Director

- 4.1.1.1 They shall have the overall responsibility for the Special Olympics swimming practice sessions, warming up, cool down, and the administration of events.
- 4.1.1.2 Providing an orientation to all swimming personnel before the Special Olympics session or event.
- 4.1.1.3 Coordinating the facility with host agency prior to arrival.
- 4.1.1.4 Ensuring that necessary supervisory personnel are available.
- 4.1.1.5 Preparing or assuring that an emergency action plan is in place
- 4.1.1.6 Examining the facility to ensure that the minimum quality standards are present in the following areas for each event:
- 4.1.1.6.1 Safety equipment
 - 4.1.1.6.2 Venue Flow of People
 - 4.1.1.6.3 Sanitary water conditions
 - 4.1.1.6.4 Safe environmental factors
 - 4.1.1.6.5 When a beach or lake is used for a Special Olympics event, the Event Director shall take extra precautions to ensure that safe swimming practices are



followed. Note: All participants, including athletes, coaches and volunteers who participate in any boating activity, whether in a pool or on open water, are required to wear a certified personal flotation device (PFD) at all times when inside the boat.

- 4.1.1.6.6 Ensuring that lifeguards are aware of Special Olympics athletes who may have a history of seizures.
- 4.1.1.6.7 Medical restrictions exist for some athletes (for example, Down syndrome athletes diagnosed with Atlanto-Axial Instability competing in butterfly, individual medley events and dive starts). Prior to allowing athletes to compete in these events, the Event Director should review the General Rules section on eligibility.

4.2 Technical Delegate

- 4.2.1 The Technical Delegate shall represent SOI as the key sport advisor for a specific sport and shall be responsible for ensuring that the GOC of the Games correctly interprets, implements and enforces Special Olympics Sports Rules and modifications, the rules of the relevant IF and current rule changes.
- 4.2.2 The Technical Delegate shall advise the GOC on the technical requirements of the specific sport to ensure a safe, quality and dignified sports environment.
- 4.2.3 The Technical Delegate shall be the final authority on each of these matters.

4.3 Meet Referee

4.4 Judges (stroke and turn judges)

4.5 Chief Timekeeper

4.6 Timekeepers (refer to Section 3.2 Equipment – 3.2.2).

4.7 Starter

4.8 Announcer

4.9 Results – control desk personnel

4.10 Finish Judges (If 3 Timekeepers per lane and electronic timing cannot be supplied)

4.11 Lifeguard

4.11.1 Lifeguard Qualifications

4.11.1.1 Current lifeguard certificate

4.11.1.2 Current CPR certificate

4.11.1.3 Current standard first aid certificate (or equivalent)

4.12 Head Coach

4.12.1 Head Coach Qualifications

4.12.1.1 It is recommended that the Head Coach be certified by Special Olympics.

4.12.1.2 The Head Coach should possess a current certification in CPR and standard first aid (or equivalent).

4.12.1.3 It is recommended that the Head Coach have some level of basic life saving certification.

4.12.1.4 If the Head Coach, or any coach, shall serve as a lifeguard, they must meet the qualifications as specified above.



5. SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

All Special Olympics swimming training, recreational sessions and competition events shall be conducted in accordance with the following practices, rules and procedures in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all Special Olympics athletes, coaches and volunteers:

5.1 Basic Rules

- 5.1.1 There shall be at least one certified lifeguard on duty for every 25 swimmers in the water.
- 5.1.2 The sole function of the lifeguard shall be to guard. If no relief lifeguard is available, the pool must be cleared, even for a short duration, when a lifeguard must leave the pool side.
- 5.1.3 The Event Director will review the Emergency Action Plan prior to each occasion.
- 5.1.4 Athlete medical history forms shall be on site and relevant information shall be discussed with the lifeguard or medical personnel on duty in advance of the aquatic activity.
- 5.1.5 Pool depths must be marked and easily visible.
- 5.1.6 The minimum depth of the pool for racing starts shall meet World Aquatics or NGB specifications.
- 5.1.7 It is recommended that all starting blocks meet World Aquatics or NGB specifications.
- 5.1.8 Safety lines must be in place to divide shallow and deep water areas during recreational aquatic activities.
- 5.1.9 A pool facility shall not be used unless a satisfactory inspection rating is received prior to any Special Olympics participant entering the water.
- 5.1.10 An athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed with Atlanto-Axial Instability may not participate in Butterfly events, Individual Medley events, diving starts or diving. For additional information and the procedure for waiver of this restriction, please refer to Article I, Addendum E.
- 5.1.11 If in the judgment of the referee or competition management an athlete's swimming competence demonstrates that the athlete is not capable of completing the race distance and may even put his/her life in danger, the referee may, with the Technical Delegate's approval, require a test of swimming competence before the athlete is allowed to compete in any further swimming event or in any final.
- 5.1.12 There shall be enough coaches in accordance with World Aquatics, program or NGB guidelines.

5.2 Emergency Action Plan

- 5.2.1 An Emergency Action Plan shall be in place prior to any Special Olympics participants entering the water for any reason, be it training, competition or recreation. The original plan should be written and reviewed by the staff on hand.
- 5.2.2 The procedure for obtaining emergency medical support if a medical doctor, paraprofessional or medical support is not present.
- 5.2.3 The posts and areas of responsibilities for each lifeguard.
- 5.2.4 The procedure for obtaining weather information or weather watch information, particularly if the event is outside.
- 5.2.5 The procedure for reporting accidents.
- 5.2.6 The chain of command in case of a serious accident, including who is assigned to talk to the press.
- 5.2.7 Other items may be required by local programs.



5.3 Supervisory Personnel Requirements

5.3.1 An adequate number of supervisory personnel shall be present at all swimming sessions, events or recreational activities. The type of personnel will vary in accordance with the following requirements:

5.3.1.1 Recreational Programs

5.3.1.1.1 Enough certified lifeguards to provide a minimum ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.

5.3.1.2 Training Programs

5.3.1.2.1 Enough certified lifeguards to provide a minimum ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.

5.3.1.2.2 Enough coaches (preferably Special Olympics certified) to provide for adequate supervision and training of each athlete.

5.3.1.3 Competitions

5.3.1.3.1 Enough certified lifeguards to provide a minimum ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.

5.3.1.3.2 Enough supervision to provide for a minimum ratio of observer to swimmers of 1 per 2 for those swimmers who are prone to seizures.