

SOP and guidelines for operation of Swimming Pools in a COVID-19 Environment

1. Background

Government of India is following a phase-wise unlocking of activities. In continuation of this process, Ministry of Home Affairs has allowed resumption of activities at swimming pools subject to strict adherence to standard operating procedure issued by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

2. Scope and Coverage

This document outlines various generic precautionary measures to be adopted in addition to specific measures to be ensured at swimming pools to prevent spread of COVID-19. Swimming pools in Containment Zones shall remain closed.

This SOP applies to all swimming pools allowing such facilities to resume operations outside containment zones and are meant to serve as safety guidelines for operating the facility in consonance with any other guidelines issued by State government while granting such permission.

3. Promoting COVID appropriate behaviour

Simple public health measures are to be promoted to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 infection. These measures are to be observed by all (Swimmers/coaches/visitors/staff) in these places at all times.

These include:

- i. Physical distancing of at least 6 feet to be followed as far as feasible, in pool (use of alternate lanes in opposite direction), deck, sitting arena, shower areas etc.
- ii. Use of face covers/masks to be made mandatory, at all times, except when the swimmer is in the pool.
- iii. Practice frequent hand washing with soap (for at least 40-60 seconds) even when hands are not visibly dirty. Use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (for at least 20 seconds) can be made wherever feasible.
- iv. Respiratory etiquettes to be strictly followed. This involves strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue/handkerchief/flexed elbow and disposing off used tissues properly.
- v. Self-monitoring of health by all and avoid use of swimming pool if one is suffering from symptoms suggestive of COVID-19
- vi. Spitting shall be strictly prohibited.
- vii. Installation & use of Aarogya Setu App shall be advised to all.

4. Protecting the vulnerable population

Swimmers/ coaches/ visitors/ staff who are at higher risk i.e. age 65 years or more, pregnant women, children below 10 years, and those who have underlying medical conditions or co-morbidities must avoid using swimming pool.

5. Providing and maintaining healthy environment at swimming pools

- i. Prior to resumption of activities, all work areas, common utility areas, railings of the pool, gymnasium/physiotherapy centres (if attached to pools) etc. shall be sanitized with 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution (alternatively 70% alcohol based disinfectant for use on metallic surfaces). Thereafter this will be done on a regular basis. Detailed guidelines are available at:
<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/Guidelinesondisinfectionofcommonpublicplacesincludingoffices.pdf>.
- ii. Cleaning and regular disinfection (using 1% Sodium Hypochlorite solution or 70% alcohol based disinfectant for use on metallic surfaces) of frequently touched surfaces (door knobs/handles, elevator buttons, hand rails, chairs, tabletops, benches, washroom fixtures, etc.) and floors, walls etc to be done before start of activities, at the end of the day and at other appropriate times at all locations.
- iii. All sanitary staff shall use appropriate PPE (mask, heavy duty gloves, face shields, aprons).
- iv. Provisions would be made for multiple hand washing stations and hand sanitizers for the use of swimmers/coaches/ visitors/staff. Provision of soaps in toilets and hand sanitizers in other common areas in sufficient quantity must be ensured.
- v. Deep cleaning of all drinking and hand washing stations, washrooms, showers and lavatories shall be ensured.
- vi. Swimmers/ coaches/ visitors/ staff should be advised to dispose of used face covers / masks in separate covered bins placed in common areas.
- vii. Swimming pool shall ensure adequate and regular water filtration and chlorination as per laid down standards*.
- viii. The swimming pool management may make suitable provisions for contact-less payments.
- ix. All personal training equipment belonging to any swimmer/coach shall be disinfected every time before use.
- x. Sharing of personal articles such as soaps, towels, any other utility must be avoided by all.
- xi. Ensure availability of covered dustbins and trash cans in sufficient numbers to manage waste as per CPCB guidelines (available at: https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/Projects/Bio-Medical-Waste/BMW-GUIDELINES-COVID_1.pdf)

6. Planning for operations, scheduling and monitoring of activities of swimming pool

6.1 Institutional arrangements

- i. The swimming pool management shall be responsible for overall implementation of protocols outlined in this SOP.

* WHO guidelines for safe recreational water environments recommends that for pools with good hydraulics and filtration, free chlorine level of 1 mg/l throughout the pool. (https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/safe-recreational-water-guidelines-2/en/)

- ii. One of the staff/ coach shall be identified as the Nodal person and sensitised on the basics of COVID-19 available at: https://igot.gov.in/igot/explore-course/course/do_312993264544849920136 and COVID Appropriate behavior (available at: https://igot.gov.in/igot/play/content/do_31304842933413478411107?contentType=ExplanationResource). He/she shall be well versed with the SOPs issued by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, as amended from time to time.
- iii. Prior to resuming operation of swimming pools, every user and staff shall be sensitised on COVID appropriate behavior, which are to be implemented at the swimming pool.
- iv. 100% coverage of Aarogya Setu application among all persons using the pool is desirable.

6.2 Physical distancing

- i. Physical distancing of 6 feet in the premises of the pool shall be ensured. For swimming, alternate lanes of the pool shall be used from both directions to maintain physical distancing, to the extent feasible.
- ii. Staggering of swimmers for different events/training sessions to be done, to allow for adequate physical distancing.
- iii. Locker rooms for swimmers/ coaches may remain in use provided there is adequate ventilation and regular disinfection.
- iv. Physical distancing of 6 feet also will be followed in shower rooms and change areas.

6.3 Crowd management

CCTV monitoring shall be ensured to detect crowding at the pool, visitor's gallery, common areas etc. and prompt steps must be taken to avoid such crowds.

6.4 Ensuring ventilation

- i. As far as feasible, natural ventilation must be ensured and use of small enclosed spaces must be discouraged.
- ii. Circulation of outdoor air needs to be increased, as much as possible, by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods.
- iii. For air-conditioning/ventilation, of closed enclosures, the guidelines of CPWD shall be followed which emphasizes that the temperature setting of all air conditioning devices should be in the range of 24-30° C, relative humidity should be in the range of 40-70%, intake of fresh air should be as much as possible and cross ventilation should be adequate. Air handling unit needs to be cleaned prior to switching on.

6.5 Making available COVID related supplies

- i. Appropriate arrangements for personal protection devices like face covers/masks, heavy duty gloves, face shields, aprons and other logistics like hand sanitizers, soap, Sodium Hypochlorite solution (1%) etc. shall be made available by management.

- ii. Provide an adequate supply of calibrated thermal guns.
- iii. Ensure availability of covered dustbins and trash cans in sufficient numbers to manage waste.

6.7. Creating awareness

Provisions must be made for display of Posters/standees/AV media on preventive measures against COVID-19 at prominent places in the premises of the swimming pool.

7. Maintaining Healthy operations

7.1 Risk assessment

- i. Swimmers, coaches, visitors and staff shall submit a declaration to the management stating that they (i) are not suffering from any symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, (ii) have not come in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, (iii) are not residing in an active containment zone.
- ii. It is the responsibility of the owners/authorities/agencies, etc., in-charge of the swimming pools concerned to ensure complete adherence to prescribed protocols and to secure declaration from respective users and staff that any activity undertaken shall be in full compliance to these protocols.
- iii. Thermal screening of all swimmers/coaches/visitors/staff shall be undertaken prior to allowing access to the pool.

7.2. At the entry and exit points

- i. Entrance to have mandatory hand hygiene (sanitizer dispenser) and thermal screening provisions.
- ii. Only asymptomatic persons (swimmers, coaches, visitors and staff) to be allowed in the premises.
- iii. Separate gates, if feasible, should be used for entry and exit.
- iv. Swimmers, coaches, visitors and staff to be allowed entry only if using face cover/masks. The face cover/mask has to be worn at all times inside the premises, except for the time the swimmer is in the pool.

7.3. Precautions to be observed at the swimming pool

- i. Swimmers and coaches shall be screened by properly calibrated thermal guns at the entry of pool deck.
- ii. Wash hands with soap and water/ use hand sanitizer at the time of entry to the pool deck.
- iii. Swimmers will shower before entering and after exiting the pool.
- iv. Verbal cues should be kept to minimum and screaming should be avoided.
- v. Swimmers shall avoid taking pool water in their mouth and if required, spitting shall be done only in the pool gutter.

7.4. Activities in common areas – changing rooms, showers, locker rooms, visitor's gallery/audience stand, etc.

- i. Ensure physical distancing norms in all common areas.
- ii. In cafeteria, seating arrangement should ensure adequate physical distancing.
- iii. Cafeteria staff should wear mask and hand gloves and take other required precautionary measures.
- iv. Use of gymnasium (if available in the swimming pool complex), should be in accordance with MoHFW guidelines (available at: <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/pdf/Guidelinesonyogainstitutesandgymnasiums03082020.pdf>)
- v. In the kitchen, the staff should follow physical distancing norms at workplace.

8. Precautions to be followed in case of a suspect case in the premises

- i. Place the ill person in a room or area where they are isolated from others.
- ii. Provide a mask/face cover till such time he/she is examined by a doctor.
- iii. Immediately inform the nearest medical facility (hospital/clinic) or call the state or district helpline.
- iv. A risk assessment will be undertaken by the designated public health authority (district Rapid Response Team /treating physician) and accordingly further action be initiated regarding management of case, his/her contacts and need for disinfection.
- v. Disinfection of the premises to be taken up if the person is found positive.