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The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Aquatics (Swimming) shall govern all Special Olympics competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon Federation International de Natation Amateur (FINA) rules for aquatics found at <http://www.fina.org/>. FINA 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 Aquatics (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 Article 1, <http://resources.specialolympics.org/article1.aspx> 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.

**SECTION A — OFFICIAL EVENTS**

The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics.

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.

**Fundamental Events**

1. 15 Meter Walk
2. 15 Meter Flotation
3. 15 Meter Kick Board
4. 25 Meter Flotation
5. 10 Meter Assisted Swim
6. 15 Meter Unassisted Swim

**Individual Events**

7. 25 Meter Freestyle
8. 50 Meter Freestyle
9. 100 Meter Freestyle
10. 200 Meter Freestyle
11. 400 Meter Freestyle
12. 800 Meter Freestyle
13. 1500 Meter Freestyle
14. 25 Meter Backstroke
15. 50 Meter Backstroke
16. 100 Meter Backstroke
17. 200 Meter Backstroke
18. 25 Meter Breaststroke
19. 50 Meter Breaststroke
20. 100 Meter Breaststroke
21. 200 Meter Breaststroke
22. 25 Meter Butterfly
23. 50 Meter Butterfly

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24. 100 Meter Butterfly
25. 200 Meter Butterfly
26. 100 Meter Individual Medley
27. 200 Meter Individual Medley
28. 400 Meter Individual Medley

**Relay Events**

29. 4 x 25 Meter Freestyle Relay
30. 4 x 50 Meter Freestyle Relay
31. 4 x 100 Meter Freestyle Relay
32. 4 x 200 Meter Freestyle Relay
33. 4 x 25 Meter Medley Relay
34. 4 x 50 Meter Medley Relay
35. 4 x 100 Meter Medley Relay
36. 4 x 25 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
37. 4 x 50 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
38. 4 x 100 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
39. 4 x 200 Meter Freestyle Unified Sports Relay
40. 4 x 25 Meter Medley Unified Sports Relay
41. 4 x 50 Meter Medley Unified Sports Relay
42. 4 x 100 Meter Medley Unified Sports Relay

**SECTION B — GENERAL RULES**

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

1. All Events
  - a. 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.
  - b. The Meet Referee shall have the discretion to allow for certain modifications/interpretations of the current technical rules.
  - c. Stroke interpretations will be concerned with the action a limb(s) is performing. The Stroke Judge shall be concerned with what action the arm or leg action constitutes.
  - d. 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 FINA 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.
  - e. Standing on the bottom during freestyle events or during the freestyle portion of the medley events shall not disqualify a competitor, but he/she shall not walk.
  - f. Standing on the bottom in the racing course is allowed for flotation events, assisted events and the 15m unassisted event for the purpose of resting. Walking on or jumping from the bottom must disqualify the competitor. This rule will not apply to the 15m walk.

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- g. Assistant starters may be allowed to assist a swimmer during their start if the swimmer has a hearing or vision impairment.
  - h. No competitor shall be permitted to use or wear any device that may aid his/her speed, buoyancy or endurance during a competition (except flotation events) such as webbed gloves, flippers, fins, etc.). Goggles may be worn by the swimmer.
  - i. Swimmers may be assisted from the water upon request.
  - j. 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.
2. Equipment
- a. Swimwear must conform with the current FINA 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 FINA rule on swimwear must be submitted with the swimmers competition registration.
  - b. It is recommended that lane lines marked at bottom of pool in accordance with FINA regulations.
  - c. 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 FINA approved electronic timing systems are not available then it is recommended that FINA rules relating to Management of Competitions and Timekeepers be adopted.
  - d. 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.
  - e. 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 or floats that wrap around the arms are not acceptable for use at any time).
  - f. Lap cards should be used for events of 400 meters or above.
3. Relay Events
- a. There shall be four swimmers on each relay team.
  - b. Each swimmer shall swim one-fourth the distance of the total relay. No swimmer shall swim more than one leg of any one relay.
  - c. A relay team which combines genders to include both male and female swimmers shall compete as a male relay.
  - d. 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. 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.
4. Walking & Flotation Events
- a. Set-up
    - 1) There should be at least one observer for every two swimmers during competition.
    - 2) The starting line should be marked the appropriate distance from the finish.
    - 3) The depth of the pool should be no more than 1 meter (3.5 feet) deep for walking events.



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- 4) 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.
  - 5) It is preferable that certified swimming officials (including the referee, timers and judges) be used in all events.
- b. Rules
    - 1) For walking events, the swimmer must have at least one foot touching the bottom of the pool at all times.
    - 2) No flotation device is allowed for any event other than the specified flotation events.
5. Unassisted Swims
    - a. Athletes must swim the full distance with no physical assistance.
    - b. Competition Managers may allow coaches to provide verbal encouragement and/or direction from the pool deck for these events.
    - c. 15 Meter Kick Board
 

Rules of the Event:

      - 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.
      - 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) Finish—the finish will take place when the kick board touched 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.
      - 4) Type of Kick Board permitted:
        - a. Length – maximum length is 470 mm
        - b. Width – maximum width is 330 mm
        - c. Thickness – maximum thickness is 45 mm
        - d. Material – a material that provide appropriate flotation
6. Assisted Swims
 

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. The athlete is allowed to use a flotation device (see specifications listed in section D, 2 Equipment). The assistant may be in the pool or on the deck.
7. Unified Sports Relay Events
    - a. Each Unified Sports relay team shall consist of two athletes and two partners.
    - b. Swimmers on a Unified Sports relay team may be assigned to swim in any order.
8. Maximum Effort - Performance Discrepancy
    - a. An athlete who exceeds a time of 15% 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.
    - b. An athlete who exceeds a time of 25% better than the time recorded for divisioning or a reported time shall be disqualified. This applies to the 25 meter freestyle race, 25m flotation race, 4 x 25 meter freestyle relay and shorter distance events.
    - c. 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.
    - d. An athlete who is disqualified for a violation of the Maximum Effort rule shall be presented with a

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- participation ribbon.
- e. 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.

**SECTION C — PERSONNEL**

1. Officials
  - a. Meet/ Games Director
  - b. Technical Delegate
  - c. Meet Referee
  - d. Judges (stroke and turn judges)
  - e. Chief Timekeeper
  - f. Timekeepers (refer to 2. Equipment- 2c Timing System.)
  - g. Starter
  - h. Announcer
  - i. Results – control desk personnel
  - j. Finish Judges (If 3 Timekeepers per lane and electronic timing cannot be supplied)
  - k. Lifeguard
2. Technical Delegate

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. The Technical Delegate shall advise the GOC on the technical requirements of the specific sport to ensure a safe, quality and dignified sports environment. The Technical Delegate shall be the final authority on each of these matters.
3. Lifeguard Qualifications
  - a. Current lifeguard certificate
  - b. Current CPR certificate
  - c. Current standard first aid certificate (or equivalent)
  - d. Lifeguard qualifications must meet the standards of the local or national programs. A lifeguard must not be engaged in any other activity while performing his/her duty as a lifeguard. If a coach is also a trained lifeguard, he/she may not coach and guard at the same time- each position is separate.
4. Head Coach Qualifications
  - a. It is recommended that the Head Coach be certified by Special Olympics.
  - b. The Head Coach should possess a current certification in CPR and standard first aid (or equivalent).
  - c. It is recommended that the Head Coach have some level of basic life saving certification.
  - d. If the Head Coach, or any coach, shall serve as a lifeguard, they must meet the qualifications as specified above.
5. Responsibilities of Head Coach or Event Director

The Head Coach or Event Director shall have the overall responsibility for the Special Olympics aquatics practice sessions or events.

  - a. Providing an orientation to all aquatics personnel before the Special Olympics session or event.



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- b. Coordinating the facility with host agency prior to arrival.
  - c. Ensuring that necessary supervisory personnel are available.
  - d. Preparing or assuring that an emergency action plan is in place as described in section C, Safety Considerations, which follows.
  - e. Examining the facility to ensure that the minimum quality standards are present in the following areas for each aquatic session or event:
    - 1) Safety equipment
    - 2) Traffic patterns
    - 3) Sanitary water conditions
    - 4) Safe environmental factors
    - 5) When a beach or lake is used for a Special Olympics aquatics session or event, the Director of Aquatics shall take extra precautions to ensure that safe aquatics 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.
  - f. Ensuring that lifeguards are aware of Special Olympics athletes who may have a history of seizures.
  - g. 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.
6. 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.

## SECTION D — SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

All Special Olympics aquatics 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:

1. Basic Rules
  - a. There shall be at least one certified lifeguard on duty for every 25 swimmers in the water.
  - b. 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.
  - c. The Head Coach or Event Director will review the Emergency Action Plan prior to each occasion. There shall be enough coaches in accordance with FINA or program NGB guidelines.
  - d. 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.
  - e. Pool depths must be marked and easily visible.
  - f. The minimum depth of the pool for racing starts shall meet FINA or National Governing Body specifications.
  - g. It is recommended that all starting blocks meet FINA or National Governing Body specifications.
  - h. Safety lines must be in place to divide shallow and deep water areas during recreational aquatic activities.
  - i. A pool facility shall not be used unless a satisfactory inspection rating is received prior to any Special Olympics participant entering the water.
  - j. An athlete with Down syndrome who has been diagnosed with Atlanto-Axial Instability may not

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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 F.

- k. If in the judgment of the referee or competition management an athlete's swimming competence 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.

**2. Emergency Action Plan**

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. The plan shall include the following:

- a. The procedure for obtaining emergency medical support if a medical doctor, para-professional or medical support is not present.
- b. The posts and areas of responsibilities for each lifeguard.
- c. The procedure for obtaining weather information or weather watch information, particularly if the event is outside.
- d. The procedure for reporting accidents.
- e. The chain of command in case of a serious accident, including who is assigned to talk to the press.
- f. The procedure for obtaining weather information particularly for Open Water swimming.
- g. Other items as may be required by local programs.

**3. Supervisory Personnel Requirements**

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

- a. Recreational Programs:  
Enough certified lifeguards to provide a minimum ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.
- b. Training Programs:
  - 1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a minimum ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.
  - 2) Enough coaches (preferably Special Olympics certified) to provide for adequate supervision and training of each athlete.
- c. Competitions:
  - 1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a minimum ratio of guards to swimmers of 1 per 25.
  - 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.