



Swimming

Activity Permitted for: D B J C S A

Council Approval: Required as per Council Policy P1; [Activity/Trip Permission \(2129\)](#)

Vendor Approval: Not Required

Required Training: 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights (gsLearn) and American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue. See below for training prerequisites

Girl Scouts may not swim without properly trained Lifeguards, who have current American Red Cross (ARC) Lifeguarding with Waterfront Module certification or equivalent and have the proper training, experience, and rescue equipment for the body of water being used. **Swimming at a private residence is never permitted.** When Girl Scouts are wading in water more than knee deep, adult volunteers with [American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue](#) (Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers) certification must be present. **When water is deep enough to swim, a lifeguard must be present.**

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. Consult a local parks and recreation department, YMCA, or American Red Cross for swimming lessons. There is a [swim test](#) provided at the end of this activity checkpoint to document a girl's successful completion of the swim test and to categorize her swimming ability level.

Learn More

- Marco Polo and Find the Penny are popular swimming games, but you can make up your own, too or try these [24 Fun Swimming Pool Games](#)
- YMCA Safety Around Water: [The Y: Safety Around Water](#)
- American Red Cross lifeguard training: [Lifeguard and Water Safety Training](#)
- [USA Swimming](#)

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities

Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact the location and/or the instructor in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those with disabilities. For more information visit [Move United](#) <http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/sport/swimming/> to find out about swimming inclusion and [World Para Swimming](#) to learn about inspiring swimmers of all abilities:

Equity. In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Infectious Disease Guidelines. Girl Scouts use a commonsense approach to health and safety. Before participating in Girl Scouting activities, members are to undergo health checks at home for any symptoms such as fever of 100.4 (or need for fever-reducing medications) chills, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, stomach aches, nausea, or vomiting. Members with any of these symptoms or in need of fever-reducing medication **MUST** stay home until fully recovered.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before taking girls out for any activity and review it with the girls so they too are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies.

Swimming Checkpoints

Required Training Prerequisites: To participate in wading or swimming activities, Troop/Group Program leaders must complete GSUSA's online leadership courses and GSVSC's 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights course in gsLearn. Adult volunteer chaperones must complete GSVSC's 281 GS 104 Orientation for Support Volunteers online course in gsLearn.

Required Training: For wading and swimming activities, adult volunteers are to [complete American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue online course](#). Additionally, if participating in paddling or rowing sports, volunteers must also complete ACA Paddlesport online course. Must upload certificates of completion in gsLearn. Links to courses can be found in gsLearn Content Library.

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. Ask your Girl Scout council for suggestions. At least one lifeguard, certified in American Red Cross Lifeguard Training, and one watcher is present, always. When using more than one lifeguard, lifeguards under 18 may be included in the total when there is at least one adult lifeguard also present. Additional lifeguards and watchers may be needed; see *Swimming Lifeguard and Watcher Ratios* table below. **When water is deep enough to swim, a lifeguard must be present.**

Note: Swimming not allowed in River Class III-IV waters.

- **Exception for lake, rivers, streams.** At least one lifeguard, certified in American Red Cross Waterfront Lifeguard course or the equivalent, is present for every 25 swimmers, plus one watcher for every 10 swimmers *or as an alternative during paddling and rowing activities*, Girl Scouts may swim up to and/or paddle in Class I-II rivers if the following conditions are met:
 - All swimmers/paddlers have completed a swim test.
 - All swimmers/paddlers wear a US Coast Guard-approved lifejacket (personal flotation device)
 - At least one trip leader, who holds a current **ACA Level 3: River Safety and Rescue Skills Assessment or higher**, is present for every 25 swimmers/paddlers, plus one watcher for every 10 swimmers/paddlers. See [Swimming Safety Activity Checkpoints for complete details](#).

- **Exception for pools.** For swimming activities in public pools, hotel and cruise-ship pools, and backyard pools, the lifeguards are at least 16 years old and have American Red Cross Lifeguard Training certification or the equivalent. When girls are wading in water more than knee deep, adult volunteers with [American Red Cross Basic Water Rescue](#) (Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers) certification must be present or with documented experience according to your council's guidelines.
- **Exceptions for oceans, surf.** Girl Scouts may only swim at beaches (ocean, surf, bay) when there are ocean/surf-certified lifeguards on duty. In addition to adult watchers on the beach, there must be one adult swimmer present in the water for every 10 girls. Never swim in an area that is not properly lifeguarded.

Identify watchers. One 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. Again, check with your Girl Scout council in advance.

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, Girl Scout members with disabilities, age level and ability to follow instructions, type of swimming activity (instruction, recreation), type of swimming area, weather / water conditions, and rescue equipment available.

Swimming Lifeguard and Watcher Ratios		
Number of Swimmers	Lifeguards	Watchers 1:10 Ratio
1 – 10	1 adult; see exception for pools above	1*
11 – 25	1 adult; see exception for pools above	2 – 3*
26 – 35	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	3 – 4*
36 – 50	2 persons, at least 1 is an adult; others may be 16 years of age or older.	4 – 5*

**Some states allow watchers to be under the age of 18, but in all states, no watcher may be under the age of 16. Check with your council to confirm age limitations for watchers in your state.*

In addition to ocean/surf-trained lifeguards on duty, ensure that you have the following adult swimmers and watchers when swimming in the ocean, bay, and/or surf:

Adult Swimmers and Watcher Ratios for Ocean/Surf		
Number of Swimmers	Adult Swimmers	Watchers 1:10 Ratio
1 – 10	1 adult swimmer in the water with girls and 1-2 watchers on the beach	1 – 2*
11 – 20	2 adult swimmers in the water with girls and 2-3 watchers on the beach	2 – 3*

21 – 30	3 adult swimmers in the water with girls and 3-4 watchers on the beach	3 – 4*
31 – 40	4 adult swimmers in the water with girls and 4-5 watchers on the beach	4 – 5*

**When swimming in ocean, bay, or surf, all adult swimmers and watchers must be 21 years of age.*

Clearly identify swimming abilities. These could be indicated, for example, with different colored wristbands to signify beginners, intermediate, and advanced swimmers. Swim tests can be conducted in advance, or on the day of swimming. The pool operator or lifeguard may determine the type of [swim test](#), 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 their head, swim 100 yards using a combination of freestyle and elementary backstroke, and then tread water for two minutes. **Ensure prior to swimming, all swimmers have been instructed on rip currents and what to do should they be caught in a rip current.**

Ensure swimming site safety. Check for the following:

- A posting indicates water quality passes 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, rocked, or heavily shelled beach waters should be chosen, if possible.
- At water parks, do not dive or run. Most water park 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 enough.
- 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. Never dive off the side of the diving board.

Safety Gear

For Swimming Pools, 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:

- Paddle board
- Rescue can
- Kayak
- Rescue gear

Additional Gear

- Goggles
- Swim cap
- Nose and ear plugs, for girls who need them.



Swimming Test – Documented Verification of Completion

Swim tests are required every year for Girl Scouts participating in any type of aquatic activities including, but not limited to pool activity, canoeing, stand up paddleboards, etc. During resident camp, swim tests are conducted at the beginning of each week to assess a camper’s swimming ability even if they have participated and completed a swim test previously in the year. Please note that girls participating in summer resident camp still need to complete a swim test upon arrival.

This swim test is to be used when completing any paperwork asking for confirmation of swim level and ability and documents that a girl has completed the swim test requirement. Girls should swim only up to their ability, as certified by an adult lifeguard or swim instructor. This test will distinguish a girl’s swim level.

Participants complete the following requirements to the best of their ability. Instructors, please check the appropriate level and complete the information below:

- Tread water for 2 minutes while keeping their head above water.
- Swim a minimum of 20 yards in one direction without stopping. Using front crawl (freestyle) while keeping their face in the water and without touching the ground or holding onto the wall.

_____ **Beginner/Non-Swimmer.** This swimmer cannot successfully demonstrate or complete the above requirements. A beginner swimmer is only permitted in shallow water or where they can stand comfortably. Non swimmers must wear a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD/lifejacket), always.

_____ **Intermediate Swimmer.** This swimmer can successfully demonstrate the above requirements in shallow or calm deep water but is considered a cautious swimmer or a swimmer who is not strong. Coast Guard approved flotation devices (PFD/lifejacket) are optional (unless required by activity), but it is not recommended that anyone at this level participate in high-risk swimming/aquatic activities.

_____ **Proficient Swimmer.** This swimmer can successfully demonstrate the above requirements in shallow or deep water, they display strong swimming skills and may participate in most high-risk swimming/aquatic activities. Coast Guard approved flotation devices (PFD/lifejacket) are not required (unless required by activity).

Please note that some activities may require a more advanced test.

On (today’s date) _____, (participant’s name) _____ has earned the above checked swim level. This test is valid for one year from the date of this test.

Instructors Printed Name

Instructor’s Signature

Instructor’s Title: _____