



TRAVEL NEWS

Swimming during the pandemic: What the CDC wants you to know before you hit the pool

Jayne Deerwester USA TODAY

Published 8:43 p.m. ET May 20, 2020 | Updated 11:31 a.m. ET May 21, 2020

Looking forward to hitting the local public swimming pool for the first time this summer? Prepare to put a face mask in your tote bag, although you won't need to wear it in the water.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published new guidelines for operating swimming pools during the coronavirus pandemic. The documentation arrives just a few days before Memorial Day weekend, when many outdoor pools typically open for the summer season.

"There is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, spas, or water play areas," the CDC said on its website. "Proper operation and maintenance (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in the water."

Nevertheless, the agency said, "While there is ongoing community spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, it is important for individuals as well as owners and operators of these facilities to take steps to ensure health and safety."

The CDC tailored the following instructions toward pools operated by local governments, apartment complexes, homeowners associations, schools, water parks and gyms. The guidelines do not specifically apply to private pools or those operated by hotels, cruise lines and other travel-related businesses.

Among the CDC's suggestions:

Mask up – until you dive in

The CDC suggested that pool operators "encourage the use of cloth face coverings as feasible," noting that they are "most essential in times when physical distancing is difficult. However, it advised that staff tell swimmers not to wear masks in the water because it is difficult to breathe through them while wet.

Stay 6 feet apart, in and out of the water

It also suggested that pool operators change the layout of their seating areas so that patrons can remain 6 feet away from anyone outside their household.

While in the water, swimmers should also be advised to keep the same distance from anyone they are not quarantining with.

The CDC did not address how to socially distance lap swimmers but pool operators could take a page from the guidelines published by USA Swimming, the sport's national governing body, which suggested limiting swimmers to one or two per lane and starting them from opposite ends of the pool.

Parents should consider whether their children can or will stay 6 feet away from people they don't live with. If not, they should not take them to the pool.

The only exceptions to the social-distancing rule, the CDC said, should be individuals involved with the evacuation of the facility in the event of an emergency or the rescue or administration of first aid or CPR to a swimmer in distress.

Cover those coughs

The CDC instructed pool operators to encourage all staff and patrons to wash their hands and cover coughs and sneezes. And while the CDC didn't suggest instructing patrons to take a shower before entering the pool, it is likely that pools that already had that rule will actively enforce it this summer.

It's possible that some pools may go the opposite route, keeping their showers or locker rooms off-limits for the time being and telling patrons to shower at home and wear their swimsuits under their clothes when they arrive and leave. That's what USA Swimming has recommended athletes do for now.

Keep frequently touched surfaces clean

The guidelines also encouraged pool staffs to regularly disinfect frequently touched surfaces on the pool deck and in the locker room, including:

- Pool ladder handles
- Water slides
- Lounge and deck chairs
- Tabletops
- Pool noodles
- Kickboards
- Door handles in locker rooms and restrooms
- Showers
- Handwashing stations
- Diaper-changing stations

For pool facilities that provide towels to patrons, the CDC advised washing in the warmest appropriate water temperature and allowing them to dry completely. It also suggested devising a system so that furniture, pool equipment and other items are disinfected before being given to the next user and are kept separate from ones that have not yet been cleaned.

The CDC also recommended no-touch trash cans.

Don't share goggles and other gear

The sharing of pool equipment that touches the face and is difficult to disinfect – such as goggles and snorkels – should be discouraged, even among patrons from the same household. Any other gear should not be shared with people from outside your home.

Whistles won't be the only warnings you hear

The CDC recommended that pool staff use the public address system and the facility's social media accounts to regularly broadcast announcements on how to stop the spread of the virus.

Who's in charge of enforcing all this?

The onus to enforce these guidelines will largely be on the lifeguards and on-deck staff and their managers. The CDC advised pool managers to arrange duty schedules so that staff who are not actively guarding be assigned to monitor the use of face coverings, hand-washing and social distancing practices.

'Hygiene is the new luxury': How cruise ship design could evolve to ward against outbreaks

What if someone gets sick or tests positive for COVID-19?

Public pool operators should have a plan to isolate staff or patrons with symptoms, such as cough, shortness of breath and fever, and transport them to their homes or health care provider, if needed.

At least one person should be designated as the COVID-19 point of contact. That person should respond to all virus-related concerns and all staff should know how to reach that person.

The local health authorities should also immediately be notified of any COVID-19 cases and staff and patrons should be notified of potential exposure within the boundaries of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

Any employee or patron who has tested positive for COVID-19, displays symptoms or has been around anyone with the disease in the last two weeks should not enter the facility until they have safely ended their 14-day isolation.

Weighing whether to travel this summer? What to consider before you hit the road