



Special Olympics  
South Dakota  
Swimming Handbook  
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Practice ideas, skill assessment and development, and rules can be found in the SOI Quick Start Guides and SOI Rules for each respective sport at <https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/sports/sports-offered?locale=en>



# Special Olympics South Dakota Swimming Handbook

## SWIMMING RULES OF COMPETITION

### General Rules

The technical rules of competition are noted in the FINA Rule Book. National/Chapter Programs may substitute their local NGB rules.

The Event Director in cooperation with the Sports Management Team shall have the authority to adjust these rules on a case-by-case basis for the safety and well-being of an athlete. The Event Director may intervene in the competition at any time to ensure that the appropriate regulations are observed and shall adjudicate all protests related to the competition in progress.

Touching the Ground or Lane Rope - If during competition an athlete touches the ground they are okay. Athletes can use this or the lane ropes for a break but cannot propel forward from the ground or rope. If an athlete propels themselves forward they will be disqualified and receive a participation ribbon.

Standing on the bottom during any race is allowed only for the purpose of resting. Walking on or jumping from the bottom (making forward progress) may disqualify the swimmer. He/she will receive a participation ribbon.

Athletes must start and finish their event in their own lane. Distracting or interfering with another swimmer's race will result in DQ and the athlete will be awarded a participation ribbon. (includes interference when exiting pool before entire race is over)

Any swimmer making 2 false starts will be disqualified and awarded a participation ribbon.

No athlete will be permitted to use or wear any device that may aid his/her speed, buoyancy or endurance. (Ex: webbed gloves, flippers, fins)

Athletes are eligible to participate in up to 3 individual events and 1 relay (either traditional or unified).

Area participation is required to advance to state competition.

### The Meet

Starts - All starts will consist of two commands ... "Take your marks," and then upon all swimmers being stationary, the start signal.

Staging & Competition Area - A closed competition policy, which includes staging and competition areas, will be enforced. This is being done to provide a more controlled and manageable event. We do, however, realize that a small percentage of athletes may need individualized assistance to perform to the best of their ability. In cases when the individual performance of an athlete may be affected or when their behavior may affect the performance of other athletes, coaches or chaperones will be allowed to accompany those athletes in competition areas otherwise considered closed (See assistance needed definitions).

Divisions - To maximize pool time, some divisions will be run simultaneously in the pool.

### **Swimming Attire Recommendations:**

Swimsuit can be anything that resembles skin in fit and feel. Made of quick drying fabric such as nylon or lycra.

Males: Board shorts, swim trunks, swim briefs or jammers with drawstring/elastic waist.

Females: One piece swimsuit is recommended.

Goggles, nose clips, swim caps, aqua shoes for walking events are acceptable equipment.

Awards clothing recommendations - Athletes are encouraged to wear team shirt, shorts or have towel wrapped around midsection during awards.

### **Coaches/Delegations Guidelines during Competition:**

Coaches/designees will have athletes at staging at appropriate times.

After escorting athlete to staging, the coach/designee will return to team's designated area.

Coaches will not coach from sideline of pool or walk along pool edge during competition (exception: assisted events) AND will remain in team's designated area during events unless special circumstances (see Assistance Needed definitions).

Only registered members of delegations with credentials will be allowed on pool deck during competition.

Media passes: Each delegation will be allowed one media pass for on deck clearance. They will follow the same guidelines as coaches and remain in designated areas.

Athletes will be escorted by volunteers to awards following each event.

### **Assistance Needed Definitions**

If any of the following methods of assistance are needed during competition, it must be marked on the athlete registration form. Assistance is provided by a registered coach/designee.

1. In-Pool Assistance- Assisting the athlete getting into/out of the pool. The assistant does not stay in the pool during the event.
2. Touch Start- Athlete requires someone to tap their shoulder to indicate the start of the race.
3. Visual Start- Athlete requires a visual prompt to indicate the start of the race.
4. Staging Assistance- Athlete needs an assistant present with him/her throughout the staging process.
5. On-Deck Assistance- Athlete needs someone on the deck during the actual race.
6. Outside Lane- Athlete requires a lane next to the wall of the pool (ex. Athlete may have a seizure and needs someone very close by.)

### **Safety Considerations**

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

Pool depth must be marked and easily visible.

The minimum depth of the pool shall be 7 feet for any diving starts. A pool facility shall not be used unless a satisfactory inspection rating is received prior to any Special Olympics participant entering the water.

### **Emergency Action Plan**

An Emergency Action Plan shall be in place prior to any Special Olympics participant 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:

The procedure for obtaining emergency medical support if a medical doctor, para-professional or medical support is not present.

The posts and areas of responsibilities of each lifeguard.

The procedure for reporting accidents

The chain of command in case of a serious accident.

### **Supervisory Personnel Requirements**

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:

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

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.

If a lifeguard cannot be present, the event/practice must be cancelled.

Enough coaches (preferably SO certified) to provide for adequate supervision and training for each athlete.

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

### **Divisioning**

Coaches/HOD need to include an athlete's practice qualifying time for each of the athlete's registered events.

At State Swimming, divisions are based on an athlete's area result.

## SWIMMING EVENTS

### South Dakota Official Events:

50 M Freestyle  
100 M Freestyle  
50 M Backstroke  
100 M Backstroke  
50 M Breaststroke  
50 M Butterfly  
100 M Individual Medley  
4 X 25 M Relay  
4 X 50 M Relay  
4 X 25 M Unified Relay

The following events provide meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels:

15 M Freestyle  
25 M Freestyle  
25 M Backstroke  
25 M Breaststroke  
25 M Butterfly  
15 M Walk  
15 M Flotation Race  
25 M Flotation Race  
15 M Assisted Swim  
25 M Assisted Swim  
15 M MATP Race  
25 M MATP Race  
15 M MATP Walk

\* See this website for SOSD approved head float device for MATP events.

<https://www.danmarproducts.com/product/head-float-8725/>

\* Athletes are limited to 3 individual events and one relay. Note: Those athletes entered in MATP races are not allowed to enter any other swimming events or relays.

\*NOTE: During swim seasons leading up to USA/World Games competition, SOSD staff reserves the right to offer swimming events that are not listed above.

### Freestyle

The freestyle, also known as the front crawl, is performed on the stomach, often with the face in the water. It is defined as a stroke other than the backstroke, breaststroke, or butterfly. Athletes must have an alternating forward arm action with flutter kick. Most common DQ is flipping over to the back or using incorrect arm action and/or incorrect kick for more than 1 ½ strokes.

Starts: Athletes must have two feet and one hand touching the wall. Diving starts are allowed.

Turns: Athletes, at each turn, shall touch the wall with one hand if using open turns at, above, or below the water. Flip turns are acceptable.

Finish: Athletes shall touch the wall with at least one hand.

*Distances Offered:* 100, 50 and 25, 15

## **Backstroke**

The backstroke, also known as the back crawl, is probably the easiest of all competitive strokes to teach and learn, as the swimmer has his/her head out of the water, unlike freestyle, where the face is in the water and breathing and arm coordination must be mastered.

Some learners prefer backstroke because their faces are out of the water and breathing is not an issue. Backstroke and front crawl have similarities. These similarities are useful when beginning swimmers are reminded of a skill or part of a skill which may be familiar to them. Athletes must have an alternating arm motion with a flutter kick. The most common DQs are flipping to the stomach for more than 1 ½ strokes or using simultaneous arm action.

Starts: Athletes must start with two feet and two hands touching the wall or holding on to starting blocks.

Turns: Athletes, at each turn, shall touch the wall with one hand at, above or below the water. Flip turns are acceptable.

Finish: Athletes shall touch the wall with at least one hand.

*Distances Offered:* 100, 50 and 25

## **Breaststroke**

When swimming the breaststroke, the swimmer is prone in the water, and the arm and leg actions are symmetrical. The swimmer breathes in at the beginning of each arm stroke.

Breaststroke is the only competitive stroke where the arm recovery is carried out under water and where a greater amount of frontal resistance is experienced. The arm action is an out sweep, down sweep, in sweep and up sweep with recovery in a streamline position.

The leg kick in breaststroke is probably the most difficult of all kicks for swimmers to master and may take some time. The leg action is simultaneous and is sometimes described as a whip kick. In addition to the breathing, the correct timing of the arms and legs is very important.

Starts: Athletes must start with two feet and one hand touching the wall.

Turns and Finish: At each turn and the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. The most common DQs are for one-handed touches and using a flutter kick or scissor kick. Flip turns are not acceptable.

*Distances Offered:* 50 and 25

## **Butterfly**

The butterfly stroke is generally taught after the swimmer has established basic skills in the other three competitive strokes. The butterfly stroke relies on good timing and simultaneous arm and leg actions. The stroke is best taught by breaking it down into three phases: kick, arm action and breathing.

Starts: Athletes must start with two feet and one hand touching the wall.

Turns/Finish: At each turn and the finish of the race, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water level. The most common DQs are for one-handed touches and using a flutter kick. Flip turns are not acceptable.

*Distances Offered:* 50 and 25

### Individual Medley

The swimmer must change strokes throughout the race using the correct turns and tempo for each of the strokes. Regardless of the distance of the individual medley event, the swimmer must swim the race using the four competitive strokes in the correct order (butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle). The athlete swims each stroke for one-fourth of the race (25 meters).

*Distance Offered:* 100

### Flotation Race

Athletes in these events are allowed to swim on front or back with unspecified stroke and kick. Each athlete entered in a flotation event is responsible for having his/her own flotation device.

**Athletes signed up for a flotation race are not allowed to have an assistant for the race.** The device must be of the body wrap around type such that if the athlete were to not be able to hold on to the device, the device would still support the athlete with the face out of the water. **USCG**

**Approved life jackets/life vests are the recommended flotation devices for use in competition by SOSD.** NOTE: flotation devices such as aqua joggers or other waist belts, kickboards, innertubes or floats that wrap around the arms are not acceptable. Athletes with an unapproved flotation device will not be allowed to participate.



Yes

Yes MATP only

No-Waistbelt

No-Water Wings

No-Kickboard

No-Inner Tube

*Distances Offered:* 25 and 15

### Assisted Swim

Each athlete is responsible for having their own coach/assistant. The assistant may touch, guide, or direct the athlete but may not support or assist the athlete's forward movement. **The swimmer is allowed to use a flotation device.** Athletes may swim on front or back and strokes/kicks are unspecified. The assistant may be in the pool (only in the same lane as their athlete) or on the deck. Make sure to notify state office of special considerations are needed for visually impaired athletes.

*Distances Offered:* 25 and 15

### Walking events (minimum water depth = 4 ft):

Provides meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels. Athletes must have at least one foot always touching the bottom of the pool. This event is non-assisted. No water assistance is allowed. Life jackets are allowed in this event.

Distance Offered: 15

## Motor Activity Training Program Race

MATP Definition: For the athlete who does not yet possess the skills necessary to participate in official Special Olympics swim events or whose disability is more profound.

Athletes participating in MATP events are not allowed to enter any other swimming events.

### **General MATP Race Guidelines:**

- Athletes are allowed to have an assistant in the water, if needed.
- Coaches may physically assist athlete in the water during the race, if needed.
- Athletes are allowed to complete the race using any stroke, any kick or any other method needed to provide forward motion (rope, side of pool, etc).
- No athlete will be disqualified.
- All athletes will receive first place ribbons/medals upon completion of their race.

Athletes are allowed to use flotation devices for MATP, if desired. There are two approved devices:

#### A. Traditional Life jacket



- Athletes using the traditional life jacket **can** have an assistant in the water, if needed, but it is not required.

#### B. Head Float Device (**NEW IN 2024. No one used this device in competition in 2024**)

- The head float in the attachment made by Danmar is the one that SOSD approves for use in competition.

<https://www.danmarproducts.com/product/head-float-8725/>



- ALL head float devices **MUST** be pre-approved by SOSD sports staff before use.
- The head float shown above should be fitted specifically for the size/weight of the individual using it.
- No inflatable head floats/supports or other styles of neck/head supports are acceptable.
- This device is **ONLY** allowed in MATP events.
- The swimmer using this device **must** have someone in the water with them during the races.

Upon completion of the 2024 State Summer Games, SOSD Swimming Sports Management Team will review the use of this device and make recommendations for the future. **UPDATE: No one used this device in 2024 competition so the SOSD Sports Staff and Swimming SMT will offer again in 2025 and review after SSG. No one used this device again in 2025.**

Events offered: 15 M Race, 25 M Race, 15 M Walk

**NOTE:** Using the above guidelines, please make sure your athletes are entered in the correct events.

## **Relays**

Each Relay will consist of 4 team members. No one athlete or unified partner can swim more than one leg of the relay.

Athletes who participate in the 25m flotation race are allowed to compete in the 4x25 relay with a flotation device. No flotation devices are allowed in 4x50 relays.

No assistants are allowed in the water during relays.

Relay Exchanges: All participants in a relay may use an in water or diving start but swimmers in positions 1, 2 and 3 must touch the wall prior to the next swimmer leaving the wall. Teams will be DQ'd if swimmers take off before the wall is touched by the incoming swimmer. In such case, the team will receive participation ribbons.

Relay Substitutions: To create an equitable system to allow relay substitutions but maintain the integrity of the divisioning process, we will allow a relay team to make ONE substitution. The newly created team may swim any time slower than their qualifying score, but only 5% faster. If a team making a substitution swims more than 5% faster than their qualifying score, they will receive a participation ribbon.

Relay Order: Recommend practicing in the same order that you will compete in. Order of teammates submitted at registration can change if needed.

- Any stroke is allowed in the 4 x 25 and 4 x 50 Relays.

*Distances Offered:* 4 x 25 and 4 x 50

## **Unified Relay (Freestyle Only)**

Unified Relay teams must have two athletes and two Unified partners. Teams must have competed as a relay team at an area competition. Substitutions for Unified Partners will not be allowed.

- No Flotation devices are allowed in Unified Relay.
- Athletes and Unified partners will alternate swimming order. (Ex: Unified partners 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>-athletes 2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>)
- Minimum practice requirements are the same for Unified Partners and Special Olympics Athletes.

*Distance Offered:* 4 x 25

## **AWARDS CRITERIA**

- STATE EVENTS:  
Individual medals will be awarded to the first three places in each division. Place ribbons will be awarded for 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> place in individual events and relays.
- AREA EVENTS:  
Individual ribbon will be awarded for all places 1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> in individual events and relays.
- Participation ribbons will be awarded to athletes who are disqualified due to rules infractions or who start but do not finish a race.

## **SPORTSMANSHIP**

Good sportsmanship is both the coaches' and athletes' commitment to fair play, ethical behavior and integrity. In theory and practice, sportsmanship is defined as those qualities which are characterized by generosity and genuine concern for others. Below we highlight a few focus points and ideas on how to teach and coach sportsmanship to your athletes. Lead by example.

### **Competitive effort**

- Put forth maximum effort during each event.
- Practice the skills with the same intensity as you would perform them in competition.
- Always finish a game/event. Never quit.

### **Fair play at all times**

- Always comply with the rules.
- Demonstrate sportsmanship and fair play at all times.
- Respect the decision of the officials at all times.