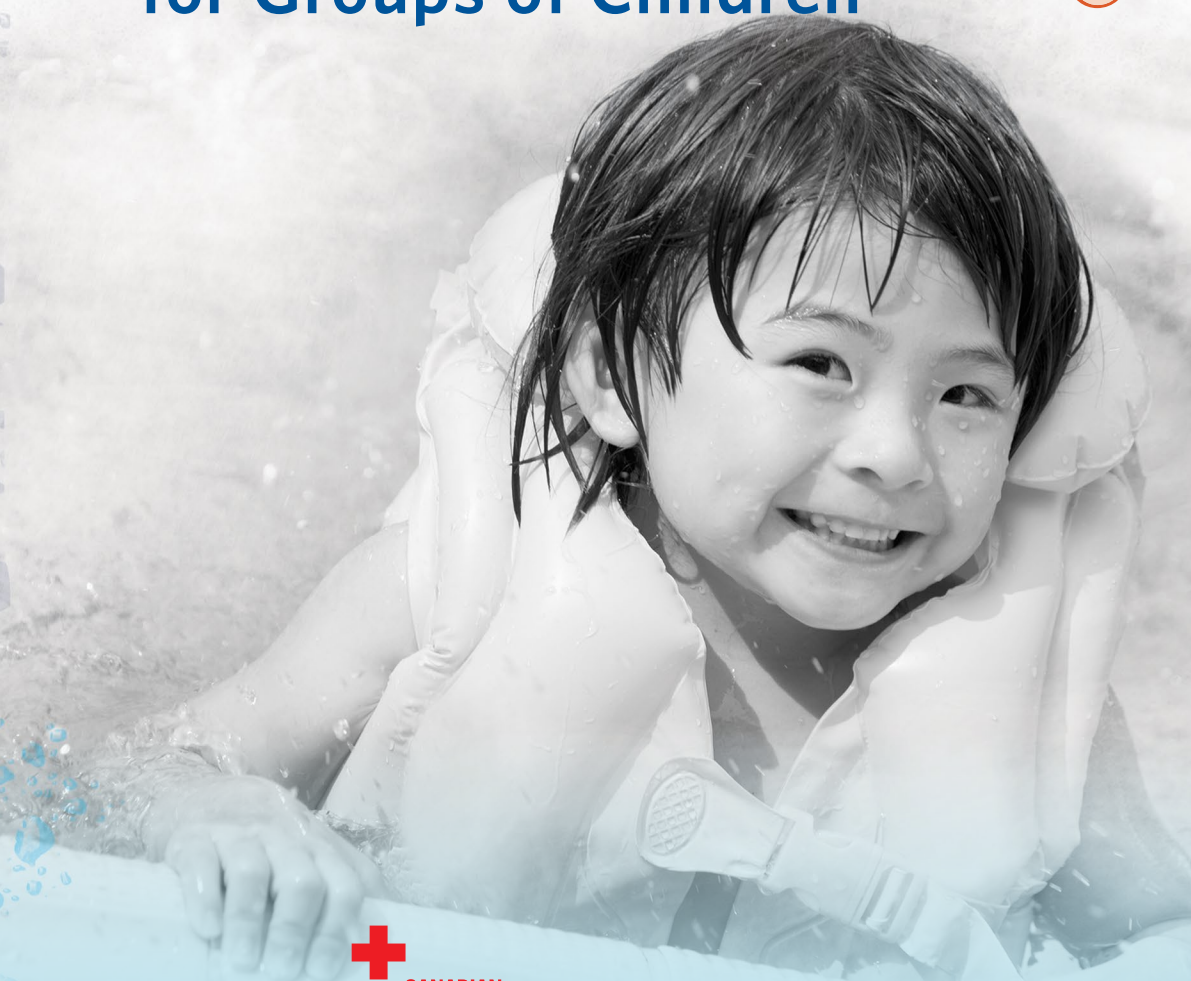


TO BE SAFE

SUPERVISION OF AQUATIC ACTIVITIES

for Groups of Children



SUPERVISION OF AQUATIC ACTIVITIES FOR GROUPS OF CHILDREN

This document was produced by the
Ministère de l'Éducation.

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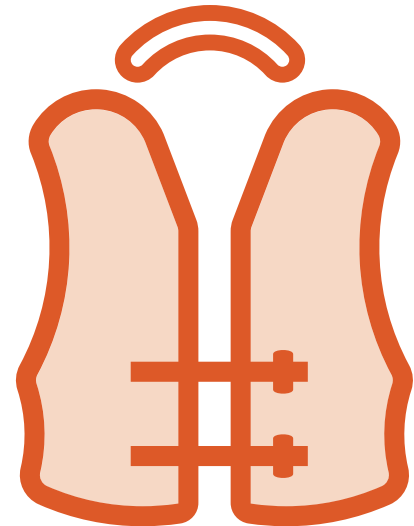
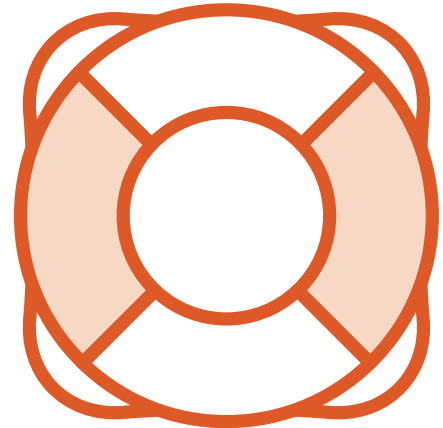


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FOREWORD

This document, produced for the first time in 2006, follows up the safety recommendations for aquatic activities made by the Coroner's Office, in the wake of several drowning and near-drowning incidents involving groups of children. It is the work of a task force set up specifically to produce a practical guide that would help improve the supervision of groups of children during aquatic activities. Revised and updated in 2016, it is intended for all individuals and groups with a role to play in this type of activity. It does not, however, address the issue of boating safety.

2

Four organizations helped to produce the guide:

Association des camps du Québec (ACQ)

The ACQ, which is recognized as the main source of information relating to children's camps in Québec, is composed of organizations that provide overnight camp, day camp and nature class programs, along with family camps and group activities. Members must meet the ACQ's certification standards or satisfy the *Cadre de référence pour les camps de jour municipaux* [reference framework for municipal day camps].

Canadian Red Cross

The Canadian Red Cross is a humanitarian organization whose mission includes teaching Canadians how to swim. It recognizes the importance of prevention through education and awareness of safe approaches and behaviours. The mission of its Injury Prevention and Safety service is to help prevent water-related injuries and deaths.

Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ)

The Minister of Education is also responsible for recreation and sports. His mission in this area is to offer, throughout Québec, living environments that are conducive to educational success and to regular participation in physical, recreational, sports and outdoor activities—living environments that are inclusive, healthy and respectful of people's needs and circumstances. The Ministère's Direction de la sécurité dans le loisir et le sport of the Secteur du sport, du loisir et du plein air was involved in producing this document.

Lifesaving Society

The Lifesaving Society is a non-profit organization whose mission is to prevent drowning and water-related injuries.

Given its water safety expertise, it is a leader in setting safety standards for aquatic sites and activities. In Québec, it is at the forefront of aquatic and boating safety, lifesaving and lifesaving sport.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide information for people who are required to supervise children's aquatic activities and outings. It provides useful information on safety measures for managers and attendants in overnight camps, day camps, schools and daycentre centres for managers and lifeguards at water facilities; and for caregivers.

CONTEXT

Although the overall number of drownings has declined steadily in recent decades, drowning is still the main cause of accidental death (28%) among children up to the age of 12. Between 2000 and 2013, 56 children up to the age of 12 drowned in Québec, for an annual average of four drowning fatalities in this age group.

Two of the main causes of drowning or near-drowning among children are easy access to bodies of water and thrill-seeking behaviour by young swimmers. Unfortunately, incidents in which children slip out of sight of their supervisors and venture into deep or unknown waters continue to generate victims.

Where groups of children are concerned, there are a number of factors that increase the risk of accidents. In a crowd, it is harder to identify swimmers at risk or in distress, and easier for individual children to evade supervision and break the safety rules.

It is important that supervisors be familiar with the circumstances in which drowning can occur, so they can prevent it. For example, children in distress can be difficult to identify, since their arm movements may look the same as those of a bather playing. Contrary to popular belief, victims will not call for help, because all their effort is invested in breathing. Supervisors must therefore pay careful attention to the body language and facial expressions of swimmers. Constant, intensive supervision is needed because a child who is unable to swim can slip below the water surface without a trace within 20 to 60 seconds.

For all these reasons, everyone concerned must be aware of the type of circumstances in which drownings occur, be able to recognize potential dangers and fully understand the principles of safety, so that they can prevent accidents or take action, if needed.

GLOSSARY

Attendant

Any person, whether paid or unpaid, who is responsible for children during an activity or outing, including any travel time. Attendants may be camp counsellors, assistant counsellors, teachers or anyone entrusted with the care of children.

Caregiver

A parent, guardian or person responsible for a child entrusted to an organization.

Host site manager

A person who is responsible for managing a water facility used by organized groups of children, including a swimming pool, public beach or water park.

Lifeguard

A person responsible for supervising a public swimming area, with the qualifications required for that purpose, in accordance with the *Regulation respecting safety in public baths*.

Organizing manager

A person such as the manager of an overnight camp, day camp, daycare centre or school outing, who is in charge of an organization that offers supervised activities.

PFD

A personal flotation device.

Special needs

Needs arising from a child's medical condition or from problems relating to mental or physical health. Examples include needs arising from a physical or mental disability, a behavioural disorder or impaired mobility.

Supervised group of children

A group of children aged 16 or under, led by people who are trained in child supervision, such as summer camp counsellors, daycare centre educators, teachers, and so on.

Water facility

A site that includes a swimming pool or natural body of water governed by the *Regulation respecting safety in public baths*,¹ i.e. a water facility that is supervised and overseen by certified lifeguards and that complies with the standards stipulated in the Regulation. Although not covered by the Regulation, water parks² are considered to be water facilities for the purposes of this document.

This document contains a number of sections designed especially for you and for everyone concerned with children and water safety. Please read each section carefully so that you are aware of your respective responsibilities and roles in ensuring the safety of the children under your supervision.

¹ The Regulation's provisions govern safety in aquatic facilities and apply to supervisors, lifeguards and safety equipment (*Building Act*, chapter B-1.1, r. 11)..

² For further information on standards and special recommendations for water slide operators, see the section entitled "Glissoires d'eau" on the "Lieux de baignade" Web page of the Régie du bâtiment du Québec (in French only). In addition, the Regroupement des parcs aquatiques du Québec (RPAQ) provides information on the water parks under its jurisdiction.

1. ORGANIZING MANAGERS

Summer camps, daycare centres, schools, etc.

1.1. RESPONSIBILITIES

As organizers of everyday activities for children, you need to know what is expected of you so that you can provide both children and staff with conditions in which activities can take place safely.

If you use attendants for aquatic activities, you are subject to the principle of indirect liability. This means that you are liable for any negligence on their part, whether or not they are employed by you ([see 2.1](#)). However, this does not necessarily mean that the attendants themselves bear no responsibility.

The organization overseeing an attendant is normally liable for any negligence on his or her part. In Québec, article 1457 of the *Civil Code* states that a person “is also liable, in certain cases, to reparation for injury caused to another by the act or fault of another person or by the act of things in his custody.”³ In addition, under article 1460, “[A] person who, without having parental authority, is entrusted, by delegation or otherwise, with the custody, supervision or education of a minor is liable, in the same manner as the person having parental authority, to reparation for injury caused by the act or fault of the minor.”⁴ To avoid any ambiguity, you must ensure that your attendants are aware of, and fully understand, their role and responsibilities.

If you are also the manager of a water facility, you must ensure that:

- the lifeguards who supervise and oversee the safety of aquatic activities have the necessary certificates, and that these certificates are up to date (www.sauvetage.qc.ca/en)
- the site’s water facilities comply with the *Regulation respecting safety in public baths* (chapter B-1.1, r. 11)

³ QUÉBEC, *Civil Code of Québec*, [Online]. www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca (consulted on August 17, 2015).

⁴ *Ibid.*

Understanding the roles of the other people concerned, and communicating with them

Like everyone involved in aquatic activities with groups of children—[attendants](#), [host site managers](#), [lifeguards](#) and [caregivers](#) (parents, guardians, people with parental authority, etc.)—you must be aware of each other's responsibilities. This will help you to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities, which are often the cause of water-related accidents.

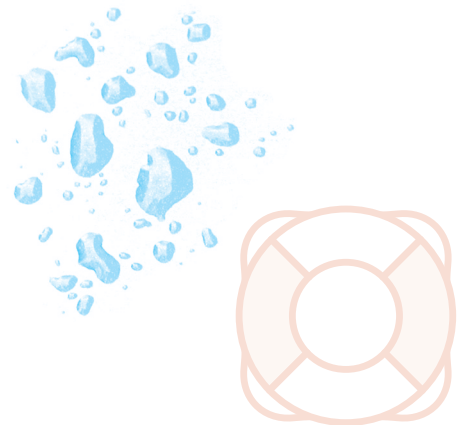
In addition to providing properly trained supervisory staff, you are also responsible, as organizing managers, for making sure your attendants know what you expect of them, and for reminding them of their responsibilities when necessary.

1.2. PREPARATION AND PREVENTION

You must ensure that the site, whether natural or artificial, is under the supervision of one or more qualified lifeguards. In addition, you must be familiar with the site's physical and structural characteristics, so that you are able to plan the activities and prepare your supervisory staff.

You are therefore responsible for the following:

- learning about the characteristics and features of the host site, such as:
 - › the number of users
 - › water quality
 - › the swimming site: if possible, ask for a plan showing the types of pools, area, access points and water depth
 - › the equipment: diving boards, slides, picnic tables, pool toys, Tarzan ropes, toilets, shade areas, etc.
- contacting the host site manager for details of the following:
 - › the site's reception policy for groups of children
 - › admission criteria, if any
 - › any swimming tests that may be required
 - › safety and hygiene rules
 - › the role played by attendants in supervising the children, and what they must do if a child momentarily evades supervision or disappears
 - › the role played by attendants during emergencies (evacuation plan, etc.)



- giving details of the group to the host site representative:
 - › the participants' ages
 - › the number of participants
 - › special medical conditions and behavioural characteristics
 - › the children's swimming ability
 - › the number of children needing PFDs
 - › the visual identification methods used to distinguish group members from other users
- agreeing on a Plan B with the host site manager, in case the activity cannot take place in accordance with the agreed rules, or if other changes are required as a result of the following:
 - › weather (rain, storms)
 - › water quality (incident leading to closure of the pool, such as vomiting)
 - › non-compliance with attendant-child ratios (additional protective measures such as mandatory wearing of PFDs and reorganizing supervision)
 - › any other reason that may prevent the activity from taking place as planned
- preparing an emergency plan for the site visited:
 - › the signal for assembly and the place of assembly
 - › communication methods and procedures: who contacts whom and how (e.g. the attendant contacts you, and you contact the parents)
 - › searching for a lost child
 - › compatibility of your emergency plan with the plan drawn up by the host site manager
- making sure the parents are aware of the host site's rules and the admission criteria, if any

You will also need to **become familiar with various group details** (especially swimming ability) to calculate the required attendant-child ratio. We recommend that you work with a lifeguard to assess swimming abilities at the beginning of each season, whenever a new child joins the group, and every time a child asks to be exempt from the requirement to wear a floatation device because he or she has learned to swim.

1.3. SUPERVISING GROUPS OF CHILDREN

To ensure that your staff members are able to supervise the children properly, you must:

- provide the group leaders with an attendance list, a note on each child's swimming ability, and details of any special needs,* as well as complete information on the site's safety rules and recommended attendant-child ratios (see the text box below)
- give staff members the names of children who must wear PFDs and emphasize the importance of doing so
- decide on the role of each attendant
- make sure the attendants know and understand their own roles and responsibilities, and those of the life-guards, in supervising and monitoring the children
- provide follow-up with the group leaders both before and after the activity
- ask the attendants to report any incidents or accidents to you, after the activity

* Needs arising from medical conditions or problems associated with mental or physical health. For further details of special needs, see the following page (available in French only) on the website of the Association des camps du Québec: <https://campsquebec.com/familles/camps-be-soins-particuliers-handicap>.

1.4. ATTENDANT-CHILD RATIOS AND ADDITIONAL MEASURES

For children under 6 years of age:

1 attendant / 6 children (maximum)

For children aged 6 or older:

1 attendant / 15 children (maximum)

To maximize supervision, we recommend that the children be divided into small groups, even where the recommended attendant-child ratio is met (e.g. 2 attendants / 12 children).

The proposed ratios are the suggested minimum. Organizing managers and attendants must also apply additional measures in the following cases:

1. The children have never taken swimming lessons or the *Swim to Survive* program, or cannot swim.
2. The children are unable to follow instructions or rules.
3. The children are not able to find their way around on their own.
4. The children have special needs.*
5. The site or pool has a section that is deeper than chest height for the children, and there are children in the group who fit one or more of the descriptions above.

For these children, all or some of the following **additional safety measures** must be applied:

- Require non-swimmers to wear PFDs and make sure these are available at the host site.
- Provide direct supervision for the children (on the beach at the host site or in the water, by maintaining direct visual contact with the children and being able to alert a lifeguard immediately, if necessary).
- Increase the attendant-child ratio.
- Check whether there are more lifeguards than the minimum number stipulated in the *Regulation respecting safety in public baths*.
- Test the children's swimming abilities ([see Appendix 2](#)) and identify those who need special supervision.
- Use a visual means of identification for non-swimmers.
- Limit non-swimmers to shallow water and ask the lifeguards to show the children where the areas of deeper water are located.
- Require an attendant to be within arm's reach (i.e. able to provide immediate assistance through physical contact) of every child who is unable to swim and is not wearing a PFD.

Children who are able to swim, follow instructions and find their way around the host site can be supervised using the recommended attendant-child ratios without additional safety measures.

N. B. - The recommended ratios are based on the fact that attendants and counsellors are trained to supervise children and that the host site is governed by the *Regulation respecting safety in public baths* (*Building Act*, chapter B-1.1, r. 11).



2. ATTENDANTS

Counsellors, assistant counsellors, educators, etc.

2.1. RESPONSIBILITIES

As an attendant, it is your responsibility to ensure the safety of the children entrusted to you, and it is your duty to respond and intervene in emergencies. Article 1460 of the *Civil Code of Québec* stipulates:

A person who, without having parental authority, is entrusted, by delegation or otherwise, with the custody, supervision or education of a minor is liable, in the same manner as the person having parental authority, to make reparation for injury caused by the act or fault of the minor.

Where he is acting gratuitously or for reward, however, he is not so bound unless it is proved that he has committed a fault.⁵

Understanding the roles of the other people concerned, and communicating with them

Like everyone involved in aquatic activities with groups of children—[organizing managers](#), [host site managers](#), [lifeguards](#) and [caregivers](#) (parents, guardians, people with parental authority, etc.)—[you must be aware of each other's responsibilities](#). This will help you to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities, which are often the cause of water-related accidents.

In addition, we strongly recommend that you establish [a good working relationship with the lifeguards](#). Exchanging information with them throughout the season will significantly reduce the risk of accidents. For example:

- Inform the lifeguard about the following:
 - › the group's arrival
 - › the number of children and attendants
 - › the group's specific needs
 - › the visual identifiers used to distinguish children who cannot swim
 - › the fact that you are available to collate the children's swimming test results from the test site and place an identifying marker on the children who fail
- Ask the lifeguards to inform you about the following:
 - › the compulsory safety and hygiene rules
 - › the rest areas and swim areas assigned to your group
 - › the emergency procedures
 - › the site's supervision plan for groups of children, if any (e.g. the attendants' location in the swim area, helping children to climb the ladder of a diving board or slide)

⁵ *Ibid.*

2.2. PREPARING AN ACTIVITY

Because you know your group, you are in the best position to prepare its activities. Aquatic activities need particularly careful planning. You must therefore be familiar with the site where the activity will take place, its features and any challenges it may present for the children. Your preparation should also include notes on the children's individual swimming abilities.

Characteristics and rules of the site

Your task will be easier if you are familiar with the characteristics and rules of the site. You will also be better able to organize the day so as to maximize the activity time and minimize the risk of accidents.

You should find out about the following:

- the site's reception policy
- the site's safety and hygiene rules (make sure the group understands them)
- the features of the water facilities and water depths relative to the children's height
 - › Ideally, children who cannot swim should not be in water higher than chest level; otherwise, they must wear a PFD.
 - › Swimming skills are not required to use some slides or wading pools.
 - › In water parks, children must be a certain height to use certain equipment.

Swimming test

If you are familiar with each child's swimming ability, you will be better able to choose appropriate measures (e.g. wearing a PFD, swimming in shallow water) and supervision strategies for those who cannot swim (under the direct supervision of a responsible person who must be in the water within arm's reach of the child).

This is what should be done to assess the children's swimming abilities:

- Ask if the facility offers a swimming test, and if so, have all the children's swimming abilities assessed at the beginning of the season and assess any new children who join the group later on.
- Find out if the children have taken swimming lessons (when, which levels, certificates obtained).
- Keep notes on the children's swimming abilities.
- Use a visual identifier (e.g. bracelet, bathing cap) to distinguish any weak swimmers, notify the lifeguards and make sure these children stay in their assigned swimming area.
- Always keep the children's identification sheets with you, along with notes on their swimming abilities.
- Group the children by skill level (strong, moderate, weak swimmer).

Other preparations

- If the attendant is also the organizer, ensure that the reservation has been made, and make sure you understand the organizing manager's responsibilities.
- Have a Plan B, in case:
 - › a child is injured
 - › the attendant-child ratio is not met
 - › the facility is full
 - › it rains
- Take attendance:
 - › before departure
 - › upon arrival at the host site
 - › during the activities
 - › before leaving the host site
 - › upon your return
- Decide on an assembly procedure and familiarize the group with it.
- Prepare and check your equipment and that of each child:
 - › child identification sheets
 - › sunscreen
 - › towel
 - › PFD
 - › medication
 - › first-aid kit
- Make a list of the objects that are prohibited on the site.
- Inform the group of the expected behaviours and safety measures.
- Take the children to the toilet before the activity begins.

2.3. PREVENTION

In addition to working closely with the lifeguards, you must also identify any risks and make sure that the site rules and safety rules have been explained to the children and that they understand them. You must also help to enforce the rules.

To work with the lifeguards, you must:

- be familiar with the site's safety rules
- identify a rest area and swim area for your group
- know the type of behaviour expected in an emergency

To identify the risks, you must:

- identify the risks associated with water depth, diving boards, slippery surfaces and so on (ask the lifeguards about these)
- identify the children who are most at risk (e.g. non-swimmers, children with special needs)
- identify weak swimmers: a visual identifier such as a PFD or bracelet could be used. **Warning: While these identifiers are useful for supervision, they may also create a false sense of security. If a swimmer loses the identifier, he or she will be very difficult to spot in a crowd.**

Explain the following points to the children:

- the safety rules of the site and of your organization
- the signals for evacuation and assembly
- safety signals
- the assembly area

Lastly, identify the children who must wear a PFD, and help them to find and put on PFDs of the right size. Also make sure they keep the PFDs on at all times when they are in the water.

2.4. MONITORING AND SUPERVISION

The lifeguards are not the only people responsible for monitoring and supervision. You must apply the same monitoring and supervisory measures for aquatic activities as you would for any other activity.

In addition to the measures listed below, you must be aware of the steps required to deal with any particular features of the group taking part in the activity. Please see [section 1.4](#) of this document, which describes attendant-child ratios and the additional safety measures that are recommended in specific cases.

The main monitoring and supervision measures are as follows:

- Review each person's responsibilities: lifeguards and other attendants.
- Select a meeting point for the start and end of the activity and inform all group members.
- Decide who will be responsible for taking the children to the changing rooms and toilets. Never let a child go to the toilet alone.

- Provide proper supervision by:
 - › establishing visual contact with the children and being in a position to hear them and speak to them in your section of the swimming area
 - › remaining close by
 - › monitoring them continuously
 - › positioning yourself so that you are able to alert a lifeguard quickly, if necessary
 - › avoiding distractions: do not engage in conversations with other attendants
- Make sure the children can identify you easily: for example, wear a bandana or t-shirt bearing the organization's logo or another distinguishing feature.
- At busy sites, place a flag or banner bearing the organization's logo (camp, school, etc.) at the meeting point.
- Establish monitoring and verification techniques: the buddy system, head counts, visual identification devices for non-swimmers.

The children will not always be on the surface of the water. To maintain visual contact, you must remember that water is a three-dimensional space. You must also identify elements that may conceal the children from sight, such as reflections of light on the water surface and movements of the water that may render the surface translucent or opaque, as well as floating objects, other swimmers and pool walls. By changing your position to offset these things, you can ensure that all the children are within your field of vision at all times.

Other effective techniques

The buddy system

Each child is paired with a friend, and the two must stay together and watch out for one another. When you shout “buddy-up,” the pairs must re-form so that you can see them and make sure everyone is present.

Head counting

You must count the children in and out of the water on a regular basis. To do this, it is easiest to identify the children by sector (deep end, shallow end, rest area, picnic table, etc.), or evacuate the swimming area (pool or beach) and send everyone to the meeting point.

Visual scanning

Monitor the movements of children who go underwater (by diving or jumping, or by ducking under the surface), and make sure they re-emerge. You should also monitor the movements of non-swimmers, to make sure they stay in the appropriate section of the swimming area.

Examples of visual identifiers for non-swimmers (i.e. children who do not pass the site’s swimming test):

- coloured bracelets
- PFDs
- different coloured bathing caps
- a mark on the body (e.g. shoulder)

2.5. INTERVENTION

In spite of all your preparation and preventive measures, emergencies can happen and you must be **prepared to act**. This is not the time to improvise. [Appendix 3](#) presents an example of the type of emergency that can occur during swimming activities.

Emergency plan

To make sure your emergency plan is effective:

- Identify different scenarios **before** the activity, along with the actions required in each type of situation:
 - › injury
 - › drowning⁶
 - › missing child
- **Test the emergency plan as often as possible by simulating different situations.**
- Make sure all those concerned know what they must do:
 - › other attendants
 - › children
- Tell the children about the various aspects of the emergency plan and make sure they understand:
 - › the signal for assembly
 - › the assembly point and the landmark used to identify it

⁶ Here, the term “drowning” includes what used to be referred to as “near-drowning,” i.e. respiratory failure as a result of being submerged or immersed in liquid (the definition proposed by the World Health Organization). “Drowning” may or may not be fatal.

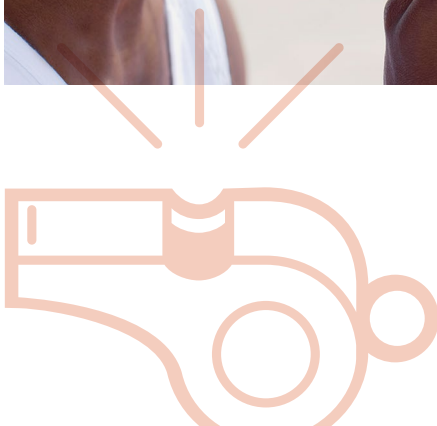
Recognition and intervention

When action is needed, remember that you are not alone and can call on the lifeguards and the support and expertise of other people on the site or in the immediate vicinity. Some basic knowledge will enable you to intervene quickly and perhaps save a life.



To be able to intervene, you must:

- be able to identify a person in distress:
 - › upright body position
 - › head thrown backwards
 - › fearful facial expression (not always obvious)
 - › vigorous arm movements to the side or in front, in an effort to raise the head above the surface (Warning: this may look like a game)
 - › no call for help or waving
 - › a shadow, silhouette or inert body at the bottom of the water
- be familiar with basic lifesaving techniques:
 - › Signal to the lifeguard that there is a person in distress and then:
 - talk to the person and encourage him or her to move to a safe area
 - throw a rope-free object that will float and encourage the person to use it as a means of moving to safety; or throw a similar object with a rope and pull the person to safety
 - › If you are in the water and can touch the bottom, pull the person to the surface and immediately notify the lifeguard.



The following table shows the steps to be taken in an emergency. They are simple and include the participation of other people.

Attendant 1 (first witness to the incident)	
1	Maintain visual contact with the child.
2	Immediately alert the lifeguards and other attendants.
3	Help the child (where applicable).
4	Give the lifeguard all the information needed for the incident report.

Other attendants	
1	Evacuate all the groups of children, following the instructions given by the lifeguards.
2	Assemble the groups at a place indicated by the lifeguards and check who is present using the buddy technique.
3	Reassure the children and keep them busy.

If a child goes missing at a water facility

If one of the children under your care disappears from your field of vision, do not look for him or her by yourself. It is essential that the lifeguards check all the bathing areas first, as quickly as possible. Once they have confirmed that the child is not in any of the bathing areas, they will direct the search to the other areas of the site.

If a child goes missing, please apply the following procedure:

1. Immediately notify the closest lifeguard.
2. Order the children out of the water if the lifeguard asks you to do so.
3. Check whether the children under your care are all present, and notify the lifeguards if one is missing.
4. Briefly describe the missing child to the lifeguards.
5. Monitor the children in your group until the lifeguards give the signal to go back into the water.
6. Once the lifeguards have confirmed that the child is not in the water, and only then, you may join the search in the other non-aquatic areas of the site.

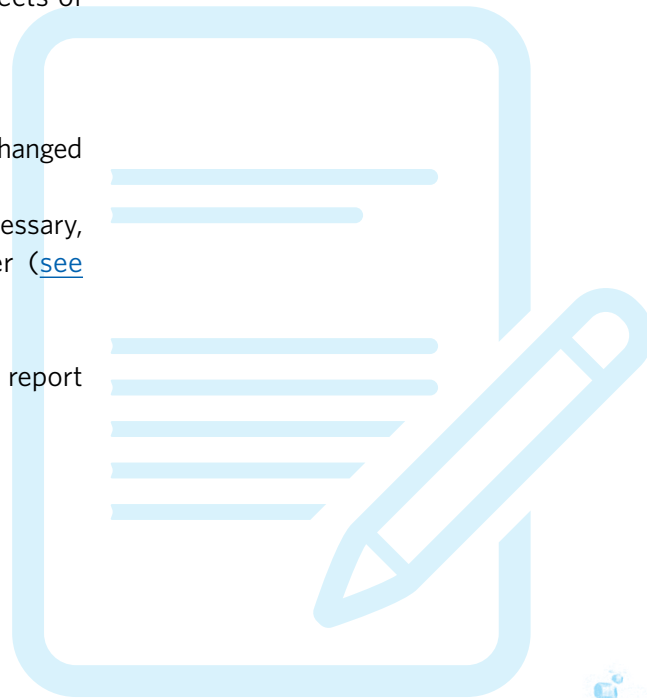
2.6. EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF REMEDIAL ACTION

After an incident, it is important to review the situation with the other people concerned, in order to devise solutions for future activities. Even when everything goes well, it is useful to see whether certain elements could be improved. Identify any positive aspects of the activity.

Examine the situation in detail:

- decide which aspects need to be improved or changed
- inform managers about the day's events
- complete an incident or accident report if necessary, and submit it to the organizing manager ([see Appendix 4](#) for a sample report)

We recommend that you complete an activity report whether or not an incident occurred.



3. HOST SITE MANAGERS

3.1. RESPONSIBILITIES

If you employ a lifeguard, you are subject to the principle of indirect liability, meaning that you are liable for any negligence on the part of your employees. Under the *Civil Code of Québec*:

Article 1457. Every person has a duty to abide by the rules of conduct incumbent on him, according to the circumstances, usage or law, so as not to cause injury to another.

Where he is endowed with reason and fails in this duty, he is liable for any injury he causes to another by such fault and is bound to make reparation for the injury, whether it be bodily, moral or material in nature.

He is also bound, in certain cases, to make reparation for injury caused to another by the act or fault of another person or by the act of things in his custody.

Article 1463. The principal is bound to make reparation for injury caused by the fault of his agents and servants in the performance of their duties; nevertheless, he retains his remedies against them.



However, this does not mean that your employees have no responsibilities. To avoid ambiguity, you must ensure that your lifeguards know and understand their role and responsibilities (section 4.1).



Understanding the roles of the other people concerned, and communicating with them

Like everyone involved in aquatic activities with groups of children—[organizing managers](#), [attendants](#), [lifeguards](#) and [caregivers](#) (parents, guardians, people with parental authority, etc.)—**you must be aware of each other's responsibilities**. This will help you to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities, which are often the cause of water-related accidents.

Safety and rules

Host site owners and operators must ensure that their facilities are in good condition and safe, and that the safety standards are applied at all times, even though the people using the facilities also bear their share of responsibility in this respect.

As an owner or operator, you are also responsible for checking the skills of your staff, to ensure that they are qualified and comply with the standards set out in the [Regulation respecting safety in public baths \(chapter B-1.1, r. 11\)](#)⁸. To ensure that your lifesaving team is always on the alert, we recommend that you introduce a group training plan. This will help your lifeguards to maintain their confidence and be able to act in a controlled and methodical way in emergencies.

In addition, it is your duty to [comply with two regulations that are applicable to every public water facility in Québec](#), namely the [Regulation respecting safety in public baths \(chapter B-1.1, r. 11\)](#) and the [Regulation respecting water quality in swimming pools and other artificial pools \(chapter Q-2, r. 39\)](#).

Children must be supervised very closely because they are not always able to assess the level of danger for themselves. A great deal of litigation for negligence in sports and recreation is the result of accidents caused by the condition of the site or premises. Many jurisdictions have legislation that places the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the owners.

Water facility rules are designed to reduce and control risk factors. Safety rules are vital in preventing accidents. They must be fair and realistic, specific to the site, equipment and activities concerned, written in clear language, and displayed in full view, close to the equipment or at appropriate places throughout the site.⁹

⁷ The requirements to be met by the designers and builders of swimming facilities are set out in Chapter X, "Bathing Places," of the *Construction Code* administered by the Régie du bâtiment du Québec.

⁸ When this document was produced, the chapter of the Safety Code entitled "Bathing Places" had not yet been adopted. Accordingly, the requirements regarding the number of lifeguards, their skills and the safety equipment required, as set out in the *Regulation respecting safety in public baths* (chapter B-1.1, r. 11; formerly chapter S-3, r. 3), are still in effect and apply to all pools.

⁹ Lifesaving Society, *Alert, Lifeguarding in Action* (Ottawa: Lifesaving Society, 2005).

Rules specific to the host site

In addition to applying the *Regulation respecting safety in public baths*, you must also introduce specific safety and hygiene rules applicable to your site. These site rules should be revised each year and adjusted in light of changes to the site or its client base. For example, if the number of users increases, you and your staff may decide to prohibit the use of floating objects or divide the water into swim zones. Separate rules are also needed for every module of the park and every inflatable accessory. Additional supervision may also be needed if the lifeguards' view of the pool bottom is obstructed, for example, by a structure.

You must make sure that the lifeguards understand the basis for all the site's safety and hygiene rules, and are able to explain them to other people.

You must also make sure that the rules (e.g. no diving into shallow water, no staying underwater for long or recurrent periods) are enforced not only by the site staff but also by the attendants accompanying groups of children.

The rules of admission for children wishing to swim must be displayed at the site and sent to group leaders when reservations are made, before the group visits the site.

3.2. PREPARATION AND PREVENTION

At the beginning of the season, you should contact the managers who are likely to organize activities at your site.

This will enable you to:

- establish procedures for group visits, based on this guide
- identify the distinctive features of each group:
 - › type of group (day camp, daycare service, informal group)
 - › number of children and attendants
 - › the children's ages
 - › the children's swimming abilities
 - › any special needs (e.g. allergies, behavioural problems)
- agree on a Plan B with the organizing manager, so that the activities can be adjusted to various situations; for example, if:
 - › the group is unable to comply with the attendant-child ratio recommended in this guide
 - › a child is injured
 - › it rains, etc.
- give organizing managers a copy of your facility's safety and hygiene rules and reception policy before the activity is planned
- give organizing managers a copy of your facility's supervision and emergency plan, so that attendants are aware of what they and the lifeguards must do in an emergency

The crowd factor, combined with the presence of non-swimmers, can be a primary risk factor. It is therefore important that appropriate safety measures be in place to address this danger.

The following measures are especially important, whether they are applied by your staff or by group attendants:

- compliance with the recommended ratios (see section 1.4)
- wearing of PFDs
- assigning children to swim areas shallow enough to ensure that their heads remain above the water
- maintaining constant visual contact with the children while monitoring them
- keeping within arm's reach of the children
- being able to alert the lifeguard quickly

Attendant-child ratios

The groups you welcome to your facility should have the number of attendants indicated in the ratios presented in [section 1.4](#) of this guide.

3.3. STAFF SUPERVISION

To minimize the risk of accidents:

- Check the qualifications of your staff.
- Provide training at the beginning of the year on:
 - › the tasks and responsibilities of a lifeguard
 - › the site's safety and hygiene rules
 - › the site's swimming test
 - › the site's reception policy
- Organize or require regular group training sessions to improve the lifeguards' reflexes, physical fitness and teamwork.
- Prepare an action plan for supervising the site, inform the staff of its existence and make sure everyone understands the instructions it contains.
- In the emergency and evacuation plan, provide for different situations involving the presence of groups of children. The Lifesaving Society's handbook entitled *Alert: Lifeguarding in Action* is an excellent source of information for preparing an emergency plan.
- Monitor the staff's activities to assess the quality of the supervision provided and make improvements where necessary.
- It may be useful to contact organizing managers to ask them how they think the activities went.
- Ask for a report of every accident or incident. We recommend that these reports be kept for five years, since they may be used for legal or statistical purposes.



4. LIFEGUARDS

4.1. RESPONSIBILITIES

As a lifeguard, you are required to work in and around a variety of aquatic environments including swimming pools, beaches, water parks, summer camps and so on. Although there are variations in each job description, you will basically be required to perform accident prevention, lifesaving, public relations and administrative duties.



Your primary task is to prevent accidents by controlling, directing or influencing user behaviour. This involves being knowledgeable about how accidents occur (when, where, to whom, etc.) so that you are better able to prevent them.¹⁰ In addition, you are responsible for keeping your knowledge up to date, ensuring that your lifeguarding and first-aid certificates are always current, and maintaining or improving your physical fitness.

As a lifeguard, you also agree to take on one of the main responsibilities of organized water facilities, namely user safety, which involves the implicit duty to intervene in an emergency.¹¹

Understanding the roles of the other people concerned, and communicating with them

Like everyone involved in aquatic activities with groups of children—organizing managers, attendants, host site managers, and caregivers (parents, guardians, people with parental authority, etc.)—**you must be aware of each other's responsibilities**. This will help you to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities, which are often the cause of water-related accidents.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

In addition, we strongly recommend that you establish a good working relationship with the attendants who are likely to bring groups to your site on a regular basis. If you are able to exchange information with them throughout the season, you will considerably reduce the risk of accidents.

- You should inform the attendants of the following:
 - › the site’s rules of safety and hygiene
 - › the importance of their help in applying the rules
 - › the rest areas and swim areas assigned to their group
 - › the emergency procedures
 - › the basic principles of safe supervision, i.e. maintaining direct visual contact with the children, from either the water or a waterside position, whether the children are on the surface, underwater or at the bottom of the water, and to do this from a position that allows them to notify a lifeguard quickly
 - › what it means to be “within arm’s reach” where necessary: being in the water with the child, so as to be able to provide immediate assistance
- Ask the attendants to inform you of the following:
 - › the group’s arrival time
 - › the number of children and attendants expected
 - › the distinctive features of the group
 - › the methods used to identify children who are non-swimmers or weak swimmers (this information may also be provided by the host site manager; where this is the case, notify the attendants)

4.2. PREPARATION AND PREVENTION

The attendants should be familiar with the site rules before the season begins. It is important to follow up on this throughout the season, so as to establish good communication.

We recommend encouraging organizing managers and attendants to inform the staff of the group’s visit in advance. This will allow you to prepare the day’s activities, plan your supervision needs and monitor the number of users. You should inform your immediate superior of any late reservations.

Preparing to welcome the group

Before starting the day, check the safety of the premises for things such as broken glass or algae, which are dangerous for bathers.

Welcoming the group

Talk to the attendants before the group enters the water, and ask about the following:

- the group's characteristic features:
 - › number of children and attendants
 - › age categories
 - › behavioural characteristics
 - › the children's swimming abilities (carry out the site's swimming test where applicable)
 - › any special needs (e.g. health problems or disorders)

You must ensure that:

- the attendant-child ratio has been met; if not, agree with the attendants on the additional measures to be applied ([see section 1.4](#))
- children who cannot swim are:
 - › distinguished by a visual identifier
 - › wearing a PFD or life jacket
 - › confined to a shallow area where the water is no deeper than chest height

You must remind the attendants of the following:

- the site's rules of safety and hygiene
- the importance of alerting you immediately if a child goes missing
- the special features of the facility (e.g. hazards, deep and shallow water areas)
- the rest area and swim areas assigned to the group
- emergency evacuation procedures
- the possibility of certain activities and objects being prohibited if there are too many people in the water

In some cases you may need to assess children's swimming skills and identify any non-swimmers in the group. You are advised to base your assessment on the skills listed in [Appendix 2](#).

4.3. SAFETY RULES

You may need to make changes to your supervision method. For example, for some groups you may need additional supervision positions, or you may have to move your existing positions. As mentioned earlier, the site manager must provide the staff with a supervision plan. The plan must be prominently displayed, and all the lifeguards must understand it.

You may also have to adjust the site rules in some situations, for example, due to the number of users or user behaviour, to ensure the safety of all swimmers.

Separate rules are needed for every park module and inflatable accessory. Additional supervision may also be needed if the lifeguards' view of the pool bottom is obstructed, for example, by a structure.

Decisions such as these should be made to maximize user safety. Where necessary, they should be approved by the site manager.

4.4. EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF REMEDIAL ACTION

At the end of the day, we recommend that you review the day's events and activities, and perhaps produce a written report. This will help you to identify the aspects that need to be improved, changed or maintained. The report should be given to the site manager so that he or she can suggest improvements, if necessary. It may also be useful for the site manager to contact the organizing manager about any remedial action that may be required.



5. CAREGIVERS

As caregivers, you play a very important role in ensuring your child's safety inside the host organization. You must work with both the organization and the attendants so that nothing is left to chance.

5.1. PREPARING FOR AN AQUATIC ACTIVITY

You must:

- give the following information to the staff of the host organization (e.g. summer camp, school, daycare centre):
 - › any special needs* your child may have
 - › details of your child's swimming skills, including the distance he or she is able to swim in deep water (with copies of any certificates, plus a PFD if necessary)
 - › your emergency contact information
 - › details of your child's behaviour
 - › your child's special medical needs

- be familiar with the responsibilities of the people concerned (e.g. [organizing manager](#), [attendants](#), [host site manager](#) and [lifeguards](#))
- be familiar with the host site's characteristics, features and rules of safety and hygiene
- educate and prepare your child for the aquatic outing or activity (e.g. rules, appropriate behaviour)
- provide your child with all the items on the list drawn up by the organization responsible for the outing or activity (e.g. bathing suit, towel, PFD, sunscreen, hat)

Lastly, if you feel it is necessary, you may meet with the attendants to discuss the plans for the day.

* Needs arising from medical conditions or problems associated with mental or physical health. For further details of special needs, see the following page (available in French only) on the website of the Association des camps du Québec: <http://camps.qc.ca/fr/gestionnaires-de-camps/vers-une-integration-reussie/besoins-particuliers/>.

5.2. GROUPS

You may, perhaps, decide to organize your own outing to a water park, pool or beach for a group of children, for example, celebrating a birthday party.

Here are some of the main things you must remember:

- Comply with the supervision ratios ([see section 1.4](#)) by ensuring that you are accompanied by one or more responsible people.
 - Ask the lifeguard or host site manager for a copy of the site's rules of safety and hygiene, and make sure the children understand them.
- If you will be responsible for children who cannot swim, or if you do not know the swimming abilities of some of the children in your group, you should take one of the following steps:
 - make them wear a PFD
 - keep them in shallow water
 - make sure someone responsible is always within arm's reach of the children
 - be familiar with the signs of distress in the water and know how to react in an emergency or if a child goes missing ([see section 2.5](#))



APPENDIX 1 | CHECKLISTS

ORGANIZING MANAGER

I am aware of:	
	my role and responsibilities and those of the group's attendants
	the special medical and behavioural characteristics of the children
	the children's swimming abilities
	the characteristics, features and procedures of the host site
I make sure that:	
	attendants are properly trained for their task
	identification sheets are available for every child, and that the attendants have read the sheets
	pre- and post-activity procedures have been set up
	there are sufficient attendants to comply with the recommended ratios
I inform:	
	the parents about activities in general and gather information on the children
	the parents about a forthcoming aquatic activity for which children must either be able to swim or wear a lifejacket
	the host site operator about the children's ages and swimming abilities
	the attendants about the importance of their role in working with the lifeguards to supervise the children

ATTENDANT

I am aware of:	
	my organization's rules for outings involving water-based activities
	my role during the activity, in normal circumstances and in emergencies
	the features of my group and of the host site
	my role and responsibilities and those of the lifeguards in monitoring and supervising the children
	the rules of the site to be visited and the activities that will take place, to ensure that the children comply with them during the outing
	the children's individual swimming abilities and the medical information on their identification sheets
	the emergency procedure to be applied if a child goes missing, including the need to notify the closest lifeguard immediately, before doing anything else
I inform:	
	the parents about how to dress their children for the activity and about the items that are permitted or prohibited
	the lifeguards about the group's specific characteristics
	the children about how we expect them to behave
	the children about where to assemble before the activity, after the activity and in an emergency, and the signal I will give to indicate that it is time to assemble
I prepare:	
	the children's individual identification sheets showing their medical details, behavioural details and swimming skills
	and check each child's equipment
I make sure:	
	I write down the results of the swimming test administered by the lifeguard and apply any additional measures required as a result

HOST SITE MANAGER

I make sure that:	
	the facility complies with the <i>Regulation respecting safety in public baths</i> (chapter B-1.1, r. 11) and the <i>Regulation respecting water quality in swimming pools and other artificial pools</i> (chapter Q-2, r. 39)
	my staff are aware of and fully understand their roles and responsibilities
	my staff have been informed of the supervision plan applicable to groups of children
	pre- and post-activity procedures have been set up
	special welcoming procedures have been set up for groups
	my staff and the activity organizers are aware of my reception policy and the site's rules, and that full details of both the policy and the rules are available to all visitors
	attendant-child ratios are met
	I am aware of the number of visitors and the special requirements of the group and individual children
	I have given or made the emergency plan available to the organizing manager

LIFEGUARD

I am aware of:	
	my role and responsibilities, and those of the attendants, in monitoring and supervising the children
	the special features and requirements of the facility, and instructions regarding specific aspects (e.g. taking out, checking and putting away equipment)
	the supervision plan applicable to groups of children
	the specific characteristics of the group and of certain individual children, and the children's swimming abilities
I prepare:	
	all safety aspects relating to the premises and the equipment
	a list of instructions for the group when it arrives, including rules, emergency procedures, the plan for the day's activities, and so on
I make sure that:	
	the attendants are aware of their role and the procedures to be followed
	the attendant-child ratio is met
	the attendants have placed visual identifiers on children who are non-swimmers or weak swimmers (e.g. bracelet, different coloured bathing cap)
	the children's swimming skills are assessed where possible, and the results of the test are given to the attendants
	the attendants are aware of what to do if a child goes missing
I inform:	
	the attendants about the rules and the emergency plan
	the attendants about their position at the swim area and near the equipment, and about how to help the children to use the diving boards, slides and other equipment safely
	the attendants about the rest areas assigned to their group

CAREGIVERS

I am aware of:	
	the characteristics, features and rules of the host site
	the main instructions that I must follow if I am an attendant for a group of children
I inform:	
	the camp, daycare centre, school or other organizing manager of my child's special medical needs (e.g. illnesses, allergies, phobias)
	the organization responsible for the outing or activity of my child's swimming ability
	the attendants of the telephone number(s) at which I can be reached in an emergency
	my child of the rules to be followed during the outing or activity
I make sure that:	
	my child's bag contains everything on the list provided by the organization responsible for the outing or activity (e.g. swimsuit, towel, PFD)

APPENDIX 2 | SWIMMING TEST

When a decision is made to test the children's swimming skills and identify those for whom the risk is greater, the Canadian Red Cross and the Lifesaving Society both recommend the following tests:

- Enter the water (from a deck, beach or jetty)
- Tread water for 30 seconds
- Swim for 25 metres

Note:

- The test criteria may be established by the site manager, depending on the specific characteristics of the site.
- The purpose of the test is to check the children's skills when swimming in an environment supervised by a lifeguard and monitored by an attendant.

For further information on swimming tests, see:

The Canadian Red Cross: www.redcross.ca

The Lifesaving Society: www.sauvetage.qc.ca/en

APPENDIX 3

EMERGENCY MEASURES

(Example based on the AQLM/ACQ *Cadre de référence pour les camps de jour municipaux* [reference framework for municipal day camps])

Emergencies during swimming activities

During swimming activities, the lifeguard is the person responsible for taking action to deal with problems and emergencies.

However, the day camp staff members are responsible for the following:

- applying the swimming safety policy in effect at the day camp (see tool no. 21 of the *Cadre de référence pour les camps de jour municipaux*, first item in the bibliography, available in French only)
- being vigilant and alerting the lifeguard of any problems that may arise
- staying calm and following the lifeguard's instructions
- assembling the other participants in a safe place away from the scene of the problem, if the pool or body of water is evacuated
- notifying the day camp director

If a participant requires emergency medical transportation, the staff must inform the day camp manager of his or her destination, so that the information can be passed on to the parents or guardian. If a person in authority is on site, or if there are several attendants with the group, one person should accompany the child in the ambulance. Otherwise, the day camp manager must dispatch someone in authority to be with the child, and must contact the child's parents.

Management is responsible for contacting the various services and authorities, and for coordinating all subsequent measures (e.g. communications with the parents or guardian, reporting to the authorities concerned).

APPENDIX 4

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORTS

(Example based on the AQLM/ACQ Cadre de référence pour les camps de jour municipaux [reference framework for municipal day camps])

Accident/incident reports must contain the following information:

- name of the person who was injured or involved in the accident/incident
- date and time of the accident/incident
- place at which the accident/incident occurred
- nature of the accident/incident
- names of the people present when the accident/incident occurred
- action taken
- date and time of action
- name of the person who treated the victim, where applicable (avoid nicknames)
- names and addresses of witnesses

APPENDIX 5 | SOME USEFUL WEB REFERENCES

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SEEN	
	Chapter X, Bathing Places, of the Construction Code of Québec (www.rbq.gouv.qc.ca)
	Regulation respecting safety in public baths (chapter B-1.1, r. 11) under the Building Act (www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca)
	Regulation respecting water quality in swimming pools and other artificial pools (c. Q 2, r. 39) of the Environment Quality Act (www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca)
	The Civil Code of Québec (www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca)
	The Laws and Regulations of Québec (www.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca)
	The Guide de sécurité pour les événements nautiques et aquatiques (“Recreation and Sports” section of the website www.education.gouv.qc.ca) (in French only)
	The Guide pour la préparation des événements nautiques (www.marinfo.qc.ca)
	The website of the Association des camps du Québec (www.campsquebec.com)
	The website of the Association des responsables aquatiques du Québec (French only) (www.araq.net)
	The website of the Association québécoise du loisir municipal (French only) (www.loisirmunicipal.qc.ca)
	The website of the Canadian Red Cross, Québec Division (www.redcross.ca)
	The website of the Lifesaving Society (www.sauvetage.qc.ca/en)
	The website of the Ministère de l'Éducation (www.education.gouv.qc.ca)
	The website of the Regroupement des parcs aquatiques du Québec (www.maneige.com)

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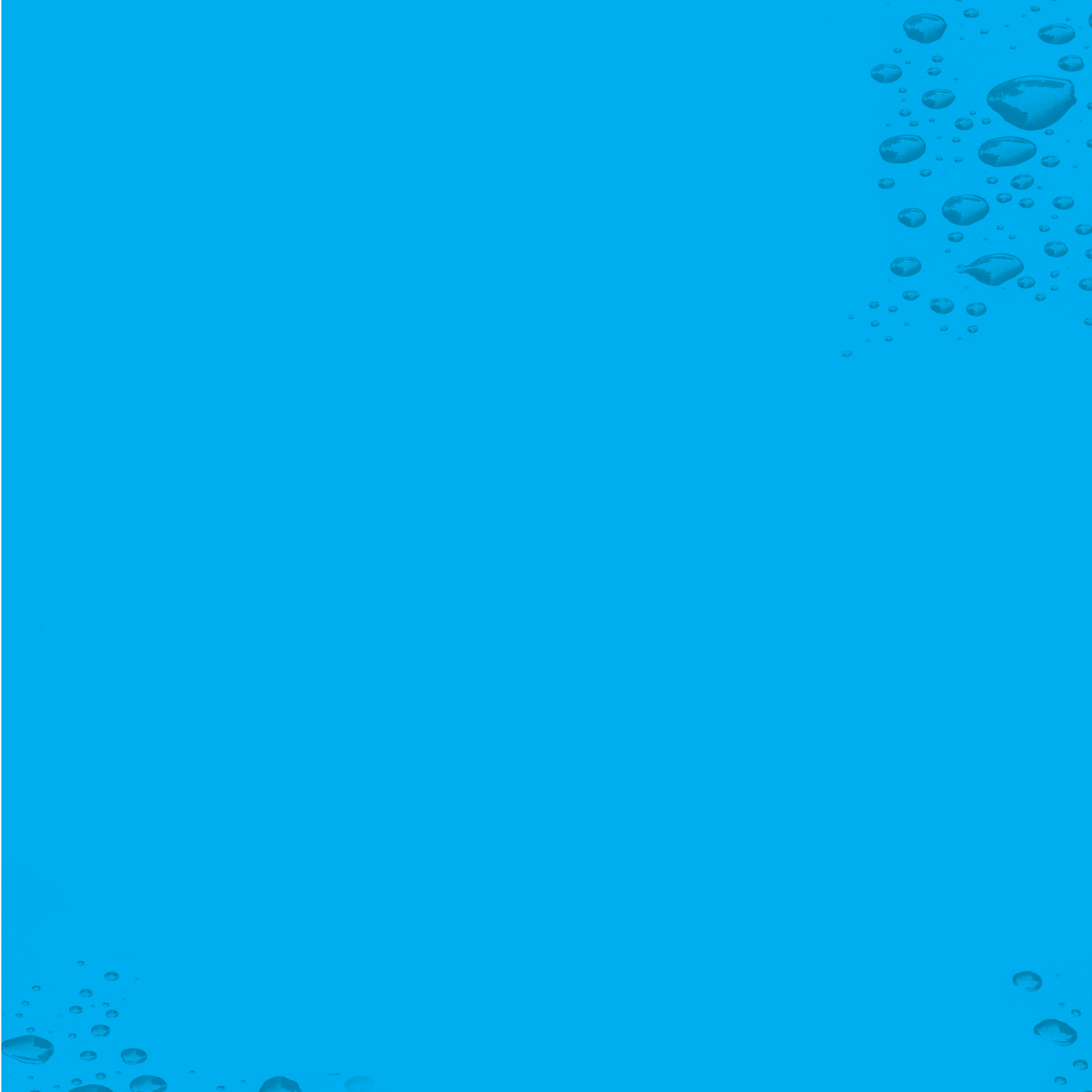
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