Inland Waterway Swimming Activities

Good Practice Guide

2018

Inland Waterway Swimming Activities

Inland Waterway Swimming activities include activities when participants are in the water – standing, wading, swimming, jumping, diving and are being directly supervised by a designated leader, guide, instructor or supervisor.
Most of these activities involve the intentional immersion of participants in the water, but for some activities, immersion is an unintended consequence.
This Good Practice Guide (GPG) does not cover activities using floatation or paddle craft such as kayaks, tubes or boogie boards.
The environmental scope is inland waterways, including rivers, streams, ponds waterholes, lakes and estuaries.

The wide scope of this GPG can be seen in the list below of examples of activities and environments it covers:

Swimming in water holes
Rope swings into rivers
Jumping off waterfalls and water slides,
Jetty and bridge jumps
Thermal springs
Environmental science programmes in river environments
Swimming out to pontoons in lakes
Drift diving /river swimming
River crossing either as a training exercise or incidental to other activities
Fishing and eeling.

A characteristic of these activities is the informal nature of participation. Lots of children do these activities unsupervised in their own time and not only when participating in a formal or organised programme.

This GPG covers situations where participants are being directly supervised by a designated leader, guide or instructor and does not cover the hire or rental of craft and equipment for unsupervised use.

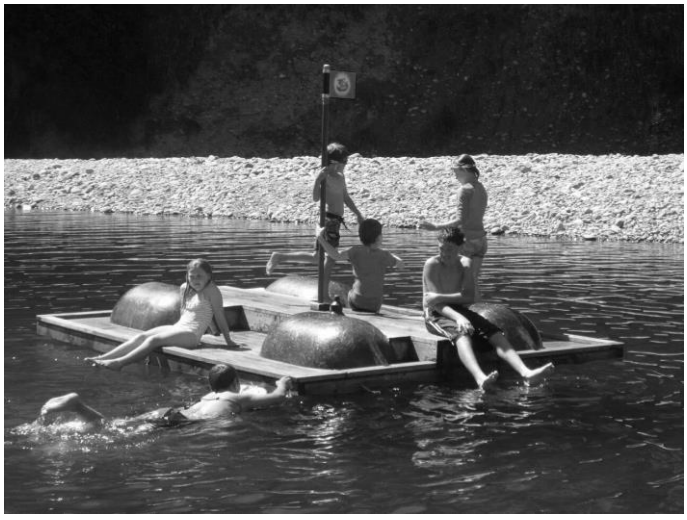
This guidance is specific to **Inland Waterway Swimming Activities** and is designed to be used in conjunction with the **General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities** and the **Inland Waterway Swimming Activities Planning Template.**

Potential value of activity

INLAND WATERWAY SWIMMING ACTIVITIES CAN PROVIDE:

- Transfer learning from a shallow and deep-water pool to an inland waterway such as a river or lake.
- Develop water confidence and water safety skills/ competencies, especially important as children are doing these activities in their own time anyway.
- Opportunity to try new activities/ have new experiences.
- Self-confidence and self-reliance.
- Interaction and socialising with peers.
- Physical activity, fitness and health.
- Enhancing and enriching the school curriculum e.g. environmental education and cultural education.
- Exploring and appreciating new environments.

"Water for me is so essential, like swimming." Nastassja Kinski.



Planning Considerations

See the **General Guidance for Organised Outdoor Activities**

Participants

Guidance on:
How to ensure the activities match the participants' abilities and needs.

In addition to the generic participant considerations (see **General Guidance for Organized Outdoor Activities**) organisers of inland waterway swimming activities should consider:

- Identifying the participant's aquatic competency/ swimming ability is important before undertaking water activities.
- Assessing the participant's competence and risk of drowning before the activity by asking questions about their knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, prior experience and water competence. Aquatic competence includes floating or deep-water skills, not just swimming ability.
- Dividing into ability level groups or buddying up less confident participants with more confident ones.
- Sequencing and the progressive development of competence in controlled environments e.g. a swimming pool session before moving to a river environment, developing skills and confidence in shallow water before going into deep water.

Participant Competencies

The things the participants need to know how to do to ensure their safety in these environments. Not all will apply to all activities or environments.

- Able to identify safe entry points into the water and safe exit points out of the water. This would include safe exit points when entry into the water is unintentional i.e. when fishing or doing environmental activities.
- Swimming and floating with clothes and footwear on.
- Knowledge and experience of currents, rapids, eddies, obstacles, different river bed surfaces i.e. muddy or rocky bottoms.
- Stationary and deep-water skills - back and front floating, treading water.
- Ability to move through the water using any form of propulsion.
- Demonstration of survival swimming.
- Orientation in the water including in murky water, without googles.
- Knowledge of cold water shock on immersion and how weather conditions affect body temperature.
- Safe use of rope swings - when to let go, awareness of other water users.
- Safe use of jumps - jumper surfaces and exits before next person goes, awareness of slippery surfaces.

- Being aware of the effect of aerated water and recirculated water and how much harder this is to stay afloat in.

Supervision

Guidance on:
The level and style of supervision would typically be required for this activity.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING WHEN DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION STRUCTURE FOR INLAND WATERWAY SWIMMING ACTIVITIES:

- There is no one 'ratio' of leaders or supervisors to participants for any given activity. Supervision needs vary according to age and ability of the participants, the activity, the location and environmental conditions and the skill and experience of the leaders and supervisors.

- Supervision in a water environment needs to include the ability for direct physical intervention. The question to ask is: *How quickly can a competent leader or supervisor get to someone on the water who needs immediate assistance?*

- When there is more than one supervisor, clearly defined roles and responsibilities should be delegated. This is particularly important when using assistant leaders, accompanying teachers (who are not the activity leader), student leaders or parent helpers.

- Supervision of larger groups of participants involves supervision from in the water and from on the bank or shore.

- A supervisor in the water needs to be competent in the environment.

- For large groups have someone overseeing and not involved in direct supervision. This person can step into a direct supervision role if a supervisor is required to give a participant 1:1 assistance.

- In addition to having designated supervisors, a supervision structure can include a buddy system of having participants watching out for one other participant or buddy.

- Supervisors need to know the nature of environment they are supervising i.e. where are the deep spots, shallow water, hazards etc.

- With large groups, participants can be divided into smaller groups or the supervisors given a designated area to supervise. Different examples of this are:

    - Identify clear areas and have one group with their designated supervisors only in each area.

    - Have designated supervisors for each zone and participants are able to free range between areas. This is the system used by pool lifeguards at a public swimming pool.

    - Clearly identify participants in each group i.e. using a system such as the rainbow system of coloured swim caps or participants wearing different coloured rash shirts. Supervisors are designated to each group and participants are able to free range between areas.

- Regardless of what supervision system is used it is important there are clear procedures for supervision when one supervisor is required to go and assist a participant who needs help i.e. who supervises the remaining participants.

- Other factors that will affect the supervision requirements of a group will include:
    - Participants with special needs, including behavioral or medical, non-swimmers or non-floaters, English as a second language speakers.
    - Environmental factors such as the location and weather.

River Crossing Supervision

Some specific considerations for crossing rivers. In the context of this GPG's scope, river crossing would either be part of an education programme about river safety or the situation where river crossing was part of another activity, such as needing to cross a river as part of an environmental science project. This GPG scope does not include river crossing in a backcountry situation or as part of a tramping trip.

- Identification of any one of these factors would indicate river is unsafe to cross:
    - Water moving faster than normal walking pace
    - Discoloured cloudy or surging water
    - Visible debris floating in river such as tree branches
    - Sound of rolling stones or boulders.
- If in doubt stay out.
- Stop before you cross and be aware of what is downstream.
- Consider having someone in a spotting role downstream.
- Wear sturdy footwear. Gumboots not suitable footwear once full of water.
- Think about how you are carrying stuff across rivers. Secure in a backpack is better than carrying by hand e.g. resources for a science project.
- Leaders need to be proactive in managing river crossing. Limit the number of participants in a river at any one time, cross in pairs or small groups.

For more information on river crossing refer to:

www.mountainsafety.org.nz/resources/toolbox/river-safety/
http://bothsidesofthefence.org.nz/ click on Overnight in the bush on home page.

www.watersafety.org.nz/resources-and-safety-tips/safety-info-tips/rivers/safety-and-hydrology/be-river-safe-toolbox/

www.watersafety.org.nz/assets/PDFs/Education-Forum/WSNZ-Water-Skills-for-Life-Guide-LR.pdf

Assessing an Activity Provider's Competence

IN THE SITUATION WHERE AN EXTERNAL OPERATOR IS BEING CONTRACTED TO PROVIDE THE ACTIVITY, IT IS APPROPRIATE TO ASK FOR EVIDENCE OF:

- The safety management system the operator has for the activities being provided.
- If the activity is covered by the Adventure Activity Regulations, the provider must be registered with WorkSafe as an adventure activity operator.

Leader competence

The experience and knowledge required by those running the activity, both for normal operation and for managing emergencies. What competence other assistant leaders should have should also be considered (e.g. where parents or other adults are helping the person running the activity).

Skills and knowledge

The simplest way to evaluate competence is to look at the qualifications they hold. Asking questions of potential leaders and having them provide examples of training or experience as part of their answer allows to you to assess their experience and knowledge. It is also appropriate to ask for references to confirm the information they provide.

SPECIFIC LEADER COMPETENCIES RELEVANT TO THE ACTIVITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS COVERED IN THIS GPG INCLUDE:

- Confident in the water environment the activity is being held in.
- Good judgement and decision making in changing situations and conditions i.e. weather, river flow.
- Knowledge of and able to perform rescues.
  Recognise – signs of distress
  Respond – provide flotation
  Rescue – from land is the safest
  Revive – provide care to the rescued person
  For more information on the 4Rs of Bystander Rescue refer:
  www.watersafe.org.nz/6241-2/
- Effective group management skills of a group in the water, including in both normal and emergency situations.
- In addition to a current first aid qualification specific knowledge of drowning, CPR, cold water shock, hypothermia.

Relevant Qualifications

The following qualifications may be relevant for the activity (including but not limited to):

- A first aid certificate
- A life-saving qualification such as the Bronze Star or Bronze Medallion.

"Competent leaders are one of the mainstays of ensuring safety"

Resources and equipment

Consider what equipment and resources are required to ensure the activity to be run safely. The participants may be required to bring this, or it may be provided to them.

Participant

What each participant would need to bring to the activity.

- Clothing and footwear appropriate for the activity and location e.g. swimwear such as rash tops and/or wetsuits, no cotton clothing or clothing likely to become heavy or limit movement when wet.
- Sunhat, sunscreen, warm hat - depending on the time of year and weather conditions.
- Any personal medication that could be needed during the activity i.e. EpiPen, asthma inhaler. Most likely these items will be carried by the Leader during the activity.
- Clothing for after the activity.

Leader

Equipment that should be carried by the leader or that the leader should have easy access to.

- First aid kit and any personal medication of participants.
- Communications device and emergency contact list.
- Spare clothing. Especially useful for situations where participants are likely to get wet and cold.
- Hot drink and food.

All of the above should be easily accessible i.e. it can be in a gear shed, parked car etc. if intending to operate close by.

Further support

Places to gain more information from, e.g. specialist websites, industry bodies or clubs.

www.watersafety.org.nz/assets/PDFs/Education-Forum/WSNZ-Water-Skills-for-Life-Guide-LR.pdf

www.watersafety.org.nz/resources-and-safety-tips/safety-info-tips/rivers/safety-and-hydrology/be-river-safe-toolbox/www.maritimenz.govt.nz/recreational/kayaks-and-canoes.asp

Overarching Risk Management Guidance

Inland Waterway Swimming Activities Planning Template