

**OHIO ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC POOLS, SPAS, AND SPECIAL-USE POOLS**

May 9, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected virtually every aspect of our lives, and the pool and spa industry is no exception. Currently, all public pools and spas are required to remain closed as a result of Ohio Department of Health Director's Orders. There is no indication of when public pools and spas will re-open, but it is expected that when that time comes, safeguards will be required to be in place to prevent further spread of the virus. The information provided below is based on the most recent guidelines available from federal and state health agencies. Topics are broken out into four main categories: aquatic venues, pool managers, patrons, and disinfection procedures specific to COVID-19. This document will be updated as often as necessary to ensure you are being provided with the most current best practices.

AQUATIC VENUES

First, the good news. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, spas, or water play areas. Proper operation and maintenance (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in the water. It is absolutely critical that you maintain proper disinfection and other water quality parameters to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Here are some other steps you can take to help protect your facility:

Post information throughout the aquatic venue and on social media to frequently remind patrons to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These messages may include information about:

- Staying home if you are sick or do not feel well. Symptoms consistent with COVID infection include: fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell. Other less common symptoms have also been reported, including gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Using social distancing and maintaining at least 6 feet between individuals in all areas of the facility.
- Not gathering in groups.
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in the trash.
- Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Using hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Refraining from touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Disinfect pool furniture after every patron. If your pool's furniture cannot be reliably disinfected between each user, consider having pool patrons bring their own chairs each time they come to the pool.

Discontinue group games such as water volleyball, water basketball, cross pool, which involve multiple people interacting in close proximity.

Frequently disinfect high-used or touched surfaces. The pool water is constantly being disinfected by chlorine, but there may be a need for extra disinfecting of items outside of the pool, such as:

- Door handles inside and outside
- Handrails on pool ladders, staircases for slides and diving boards, etc.
- Restroom doors, faucets, sinks, soap and paper towel dispensers, toilet flush levers and baby changing stations
- Water or drink dispensing equipment and water fountains
- Light switches
- Telephones and Emergency shut-off buttons on spas, dials for spa jets
- "Touch to activate" areas on splash pads and spray fountains
- Keyless entry readers, pass code entry keypads and lock boxes

Determine a new maximum occupancy for the pool area, incorporating the social distancing requirement of 6 feet per person. It is also recommended that 6 ft increments be marked on the ground around slides and diving boards to ensure proper social distancing.

Pool patrons are encouraged to bring their own towels to minimize the need for employee exposure through laundry services.

It is recommended that disinfectant wipes be made available near the diaper changing areas.

If your facility also has a concession stand, please refer to your local health department's COVID-19 guidance for food service operations.

POOL MANAGERS

Maintaining a healthy workforce is going to be paramount for pool managers. Be as flexible as possible with staff attendance and sick-leave policies. Remind staff to stay at home if they are sick. Isolate and send home anyone who exhibits symptoms of COVID-19. The more we learn about this virus, the more wide-ranging the symptoms can be. People with COVID-19 have experienced one or more of the following symptoms, which may appear anywhere from 2-14 days after exposure:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain

- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

Other less common symptoms have also been reported, including gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.

Ensure that your sick leave policies are up to date, flexible, and non-punitive to allow sick employees to stay home to care for themselves, children, or other family members. Consider encouraging employees to do a self-assessment each day to check if they have any COVID-19 symptoms. Actively encourage sick employees to stay home until:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and,
- At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

Do not require a healthcare provider's note to validate the illness or return to work of employees sick with acute respiratory illness; healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely way.

If an employee reports to work and becomes symptomatic, separate the employee from other employees and send them home immediately. Restrict their access to the facility until they have recovered.

The CDC recommends that all employees of a pool to wear a face covering/mask when not in the water. Lifeguards should remove the face covering prior to entering the water for any reason. In addition, lifeguards responsible for surveilling the water shall not be required to enforce facility rules pertaining to face coverings/masks applicable to patrons out of the water.

Reinforce key messages — stay home when sick, use cough and sneeze etiquette, and practice hand hygiene — to all employees, and place posters in areas where they are most likely to be seen. Provide protection supplies such as soap and water, hand sanitizer, tissues, and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees. Also be sure to keep your staff informed by regularly providing up-to-date information about COVID-19 and pool policies. Communicate the importance of practicing preventive actions.

PATRONS

Those that are patrons of public swimming pools are just as responsible for the health and safety as anyone. There are a number of actions that can be taken by pool patrons to assist the staff with maintaining a COVID-19 free environment:

Do not go to public pools, or any public facility for that matter, if you are sick or were recently exposed to COVID-19. Refer to the list above for symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

Maintain 6 feet away from others (“social distancing”) and take other, everyday precautions such as washing hands often and covering coughs and sneezes. Avoid gathering with others outside of your household. Do not visit aquatic venues where you cannot stay at least 6 feet away from others at all times.

The CDC recommends for all people on the pool deck to wear a face covering/mask when not in the water.

Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Bring hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to use if soap and water are not available.

Spas, or hot tubs, can be used as long as 6 feet of social distancing can be maintained between patrons.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION AFTER PERSONS SUSPECTED/CONFIRMED TO HAVE COVID-19 HAVE BEEN IN THE FACILITY

Close off areas visited by the ill persons. Open outside doors and windows and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait 24 hours or as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection.

Cleaning staff should wear gloves and gowns when cleaning contaminated areas. Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment (like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.

How to Clean and Disinfect Hard (Non-porous) Surfaces

If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection. For disinfection consult the list of [EPA-registered disinfectants](#). Follow the manufacturer’s instructions, including appropriate PPE, for all cleaning and disinfection products for concentration, application method and contact time, etc. Additionally, diluted household bleach solutions (at least 1000ppm sodium hypochlorite) can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for application, ensuring a contact time of at least 1 minute, and allowing proper ventilation during and after application. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted. Prepare a bleach solution by mixing:

5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water or
4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water

How to Clean and Disinfect Soft (Porous) Surfaces

For soft (porous) surfaces, remove visible contamination if present and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces. After cleaning, if the items can be laundered, launder items in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and then dry items completely. Otherwise, use products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 and that are suitable for porous surfaces

How to Clean and Disinfect Electronics

For electronics such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, remove visible contamination if present. Then, follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products. You may also want to consider the use of wipeable covers for electronics. If no manufacturer guidance is available, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol to disinfect touch screens. Dry surfaces thoroughly to avoid pooling of liquids.

Linens, Clothing, and Other Items That Go in the Laundry

In order to minimize the possibility of dispersing virus through the air, do not shake dirty laundry. Wash items as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an ill person can be washed with other people's items. Clean and disinfect hampers or other carts for transporting laundry according to guidance above for hard or soft surfaces.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

For more information on preventing the spread of COVID-19 at public/semi-public aquatic facilities, please visit:

- **The Center for Disease Control's Coronavirus Webpage:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- **Pool and Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA)'s COVID-19 webpage:** <https://www.phta.org/corona-test#1>
- **Ohio Department of Health:** www.coronavirus.ohio.gov