

# SWIMMING

## GENERAL RULES

The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules shall govern all Special Olympics swimming competitions. As an international sports program, Special Olympics has created these rules based upon Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA) and National Governing Body (NGB) rules of United States swimming. FINA or NGB rules shall be employed except when they are in conflict with the Official Special Olympics sports rules. For more information, visit [www.fina.org](http://www.fina.org).

### **OFFICIAL EVENTS OFFERED**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. 25, 50, 100, 200, 400m Freestyle    | 8. 4x25, 4x50m Medley Relay                             |
| 2. 25, 50, 100m Backstroke             | 9. 15m Unassisted Swim                                  |
| 3. 25, 50, 100m Breaststroke           | 10. 15m Walk (district ONLY – non-advancing)            |
| 4. 25, 50, 100m Butterfly              | 11. 25m Assisted Swim (district ONLY – non-advancing)   |
| 5. 4x25, 4x50, 4x100m Freestyle Relays | 12. 15m, 25m Kick Board (district ONLY – non-advancing) |
| 6. 4x25 Unified Freestyle Relay        |   |
| 7. 100m Individual Medley              |   |

Note: Due to the way events are listed in the Special Olympics computer software, all events are listed in meters, however, most SOWI competition distances are run in yards (Ex: 400m = 400 yards).

### **ORDER OF EVENTS**

Listed below is the tentative order of events for all levels of competition. The events will be run straight through at regional single-day competitions. At multi-day State Games, events will be split into two days as noted below. No starting blocks will be utilized.

Saturday, April 15

Warm-up	4 x 50m Freestyle Relay
4 x 50m Medley Relay	100m Breaststroke
100m Freestyle	100m Butterfly
25m Freestyle (Female)	100m Backstroke
25m Freestyle (Male)	4 x 25m Medley Relay
100m Individual Medley	400m Freestyle
50m Backstroke	50m Freestyle (Female)
25m Butterfly	50m Freestyle (Male)
4 x 25m Unified Freestyle Relay	15m Unassisted Swim
Break/Warm-up	

Sunday, April 16  
Warm-up  
25m Breaststroke  
200m Freestyle  
4 x 25m Free Relay

50m Breaststroke  
50m Butterfly  
25m Backstroke (Female)  
25m Backstroke (Male)  
4 x 100m Freestyle Relay

**Coaches:** It is the coach's responsibility to place athletes in events appropriate for the ability level of the athlete. Consider the order of events for each athlete to avoid swimming back-to-back.

**IMPORTANT:** An athlete may enter/participate in a maximum of four events - two individual and two relays.

## **SECTION A – GENERAL RULES**

The technical rules of competition are noted in the FINA Rule book. National programs may substitute their local NGB rules. The FINA rule book will be used for all multi-chapter or multi-program events. Exceptions to these rules are listed below:

1. All events
  - a. The meet referee, in cooperation with the Games Director and aquatic rules subcommittee, shall have the authority to adjust these rules on a case-by-case basis for the safety and well-being of an athlete. The referee may intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that the appropriate regulations are observed, and shall adjudicate all protests related to the competition in progress.
  - b. The meet referee shall have the discretion to allow for certain modifications/interpretations of the current technical rules based upon a physical disability characteristic. Such interpretation shall not give advantage over another swimmer. Stroke interpretations will be concerned with the action a limb(s) is performing. The stroke judge shall be concerned with what action the arm or leg action constitutes.
  - c. The referee shall have full control and authority over all officials, approve their assignments, and instruct them regarding all Special Olympics features or regulations related to the competitions. He shall enforce all rules and decisions of the Official Special Olympics Rule book and FINA rules and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meet, the final settlement of which is not otherwise covered by these rules.
  - d. Standing on the bottom during freestyle events or during the freestyle portion of the medley events shall not disqualify a competitor, but he/she shall not walk. Standing on the bottom in the racing course is allowed only for the purpose of resting. Walking on or jumping from the bottom must disqualify the offender.
  - e. Unassisted Swims - Athletes must swim the full distance with no assistance. Coaches, lifeguards, officials and spectators are allowed to offer encouragement and direction to the swimmer, but only from outside the swimmers lane.
  - f. Assisted Swims (Exhibition only) \* ATHLETES REGISTERED FOR THIS EVENT MAY NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY OTHER EVENT. Each athlete is responsible for having his/her own coach/assistant. The assistant may touch, guide, or direct the athlete but MAY NOT support or assist with the athlete's forward movement. The swimmer is allowed to use a flotation device (see Special Olympics, Inc. Official Summer Sports Rules for specifications). The assistant may be in the pool or on the deck. Standing on the bottom in the racing course is allowed only for the purpose of resting. Walking on or jumping from the bottom will disqualify the offender.
  - g. An assistant may be requested through a Special Needs Form to assist athletes in maintaining their positions at the starting line.

- h. No competitor shall be permitted to use or wear any device that may aid his/her speed, buoyancy or endurance during a competition (such as webbed gloves, flippers, fins, etc.). Goggles may be worn. Only those athletes in assisted events may utilize flotation devices.
  - i. Swimmers may be assisted from the water upon request.
  - j. Starting blocks shall not be utilized at any level of competition. Starts may be from beside the starting block or from in-water. For in-water starts the athlete shall place one hand on the end of the pool or hold the starting block with one hand. Two hands shall be used for backstroke starts.
  - k. Race Starts at the State Meet - The only races in which an athlete must perform an in-water start would be the number two and four swimmers in any one of the aquatic relay races. This is due to the fact that the number two and four swimmers in a relay race must start on the bulkhead side and no diving is allowed off of the bulkhead. In addition, competitors in the 15m unassisted swim must also perform an in-water start since they will begin their race 15m from the end of the pool where there is no wall from which to start.
2. Equipment
- a. Starting device (whistle, tone, air horn, electronic buzzer or gun): The starting system shall be capable of providing a visual start for the hearing impaired. Athletes with hearing impairments may receive hand signals or touch/tap starts from the starter or designated official. A strobe light in accordance with FINA rules is recommended.
  - b. Lane lines
  - c. Watches (timing system): At least one watch per lane required, but two to three are preferred.
  - d. Lap cards should be used for events of 400m or longer.

## **SECTION B - RULES OF COMPETITION**

- 1. Special Olympics Stroke Standards
  - a. Freestyle
    - 1) Freestyle means that in an event so designated, the competitor may swim any style except in a medley relay or individual medley event where freestyle means any style other than butterfly, breaststroke or backstroke.
    - 2) In freestyle turning and finishing, the swimmer can touch the wall with any part of his/her body. A hand touch is not obligatory.
  - b. Breaststroke
    - 1) From the beginning of the first arm stroke after the start and after each turn, the body shall be kept on the breast.
    - 2) Both shoulders shall be in line with the water surface.
    - 3) All movements of the arms shall be simultaneous.
    - 4) The legs will remain in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement.
    - 5) Before the beginning of the first stroke, after the start and after each turn, up and down movements of the legs or feet are not permitted.
    - 6) Hands shall be pushed forward together from the breast.
    - 7) Hands shall be brought back on or under the surface of the water, but may not extend below the hipline.

- 8) In the leg kick, the feet must be turned outward in the backward movement.
- 9) Movements in the form of a "flutter kick" or a "dolphin kick" are not permitted.
- 10) Breaking the surface of the water with the feet is allowed unless followed by a downward movement in the form of a "dolphin kick."
- 11) At the finish, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. The head must break the surface of the water at some point during any part of the last complete or incomplete cycle of the stroke.
- 12) The shoulders shall be in the horizontal position.
- 13) At each turn, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. The head must break the surface of the water at some point during any part of the last complete or incomplete cycle of the stroke. Once a touch has been made the swimmer may turn in any manner desired. Shoulders shall be in the horizontal position when the swimmer leaves the wall.
- 14) Part of the swimmers head shall break the surface of the water at least once during each complete cycle of the one-arm stroke and one-leg kick, except during the first cycle after the start and each turn. During this first cycle, the swimmer may take the one-arm stroke completely back to the legs and one-leg kick while wholly submerged.
- 15) In the individual medley, the completion of the breaststroke portion is considered a turn (both hands shall touch simultaneously).

c. Backstroke

- 1) The competitors shall line up in the water, facing the starting end of the pool with the hands placed on the starting grips.
- 2) The feet, including the toes, shall be under the surface of the water.
- 3) Standing in or on the gutter, or bending the toes over the lip of the gutter is prohibited.
- 4) The swimmer is not allowed to make any movement with any part of his/her body before the starting signal has been given.
- 5) At the signal for starting and when turning, the swimmer must push off and swim upon his/her back throughout the race. Some part of the swimmer must break the surface of the water throughout the race except during the turn for a distance of not more than 15 meters.
- 6) The hands must not be released before the starting signal has been given.
- 7) Turns - Upon completion of each length, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. During the turn, the shoulders may turn past the vertical toward the breast. If the swimmer turns past the vertical, such motion must be part of a continuous turning action and the swimmer must return to a position on the back before the feet leave the wall.
- 8) The swimmer may turn his/her body beyond the vertical, after the foremost part of the body has touched the wall during a turn, but the swimmer must have returned to a position on his/her back before the feet leave the wall.

d. Butterfly

- 1) Both arms must be brought forward together over the water and brought backward simultaneously.

- 2) The body must be kept on the breast and both shoulders kept in line with the surface of the water from the beginning of the first arm stroke after the start and on the turn.
  - 3) All movements of the feet must be executed in a simultaneous manner.
  - 4) Simultaneous up and down movements of the legs and feet in the vertical plane are permitted.
  - 5) The legs or feet need not be at the same level, but no alternating movement is permitted.
  - 6) At each turn the shoulders must be in the horizontal position. The touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. Once a touch has been made, the swimmer may turn in any manner desired. Shoulders shall be in the horizontal position when the swimmer leaves the wall.
  - 7) At the finish, the touch shall be made with both hands simultaneously at, above, or below the water surface. Shoulders shall be in the horizontal position.
- e. Individual Medley
- 1) The swimmer shall swim 100m in the following sequential order: 25m butterfly, 25m backstroke, 25m breaststroke and 25m freestyle.
- f. 15m Walk \* ATHLETES ELIGIBLE FOR THIS EVENT MAY ONLY PARTICIPATE IN THIS ONE COMPETITION. This is a meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels.
- 1) Equipment:
    - a) Whistle
    - b) Lane markers
    - c) Stopwatch
  - 2) Set-up:
    - a) There must be at least one observer for every swimmer during competition.
    - b) The depth should be no deeper than 1m (3.5 feet).
    - c) Mark the start line 15m from the end of pool in the shallow end.
    - d) Mark the lanes 2m apart.
    - e) Certified swim officials (referee, timers, judges) should oversee this event.
  - 3) Rules:
    - a) The athlete begins behind the start line.
    - b) The athlete starts the race at the sound of the starting whistle.
    - c) The athlete must have one foot on the pool floor at all times.
    - d) The athlete stays in his/her designated lane for the entire race.
    - e) An assistant may be allowed to guide the athlete, but may not assist with the athlete's forward movement.
    - f) The athlete must touch the end of the pool with one or two hands to finish.
  - 4) Score:

- a) The athlete will be timed from the starting whistle to when he/she touches the end of the pool.
- g. 15m Unassisted Swim – This is a meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels.
  - 1) Equipment:
    - a) Floating lane markers
    - b) Stopwatches
    - c) Whistle
  - 2) Set-up:
    - a) There must be at least one observer for every two swimmers during competition.
    - b) Use floating lane markers.
    - c) Set the starting line 15m from the end of the pool in the shallow end.
    - d) Mark the lanes two meters apart.
  - 3) Rules:
    - a) Athletes swim the 15m without assistance. Coaches, lifeguards, officials and spectators are allowed to offer encouragement and direction to the swimmer, but only from outside the swimmer's lane.
    - b) Athlete must touch the end of the pool with any part of his/her body to finish the race.
    - c) Assistant starters may help the athletes maintain their positions at the start line.
    - d) Athlete stays in his/her designated lane for the entire race.
    - e) Assistants may walk in back of athletes for safety but may not assist or touch athletes.
    - f) Athletes are not allowed to use flotation devices.
  - 4) Score:
    - a) Athletes will be timed from the starting whistle to when they touch the end of the pool.
- h. 15, 25 Meter Kick Board - This is a meaningful competition for athletes with lower ability levels.
  - 1) Equipment:
    - a) Floating lane markers
    - b) Stopwatches
    - c) Whistle
    - d) Kick boards permitted:
      - Length – maximum length is 470 mm
      - Width – maximum width is 330 mm
      - Thickness – maximum thickness is 45 mm
      - Material – a material that provides appropriate floatation
  - 2) Set-up:
    - a) There must be at least one observer for every two swimmers during competition.

- b) Use floating lane markers.
  - c) For the 15m race, set the starting line 15m from the end of the pool in the shallow end. For the 25m race, athletes will race the full 25m.
  - d) Mark the lanes two meters apart.
- 3) Rules:
- a) Start – the swimmer must be in the water with one hand placed touching the pool deck edge, or, with both hands holding the kick board with the swimmers back against the pool edge.
  - b) Race – Both hands should remain on the kick board at all times. The swimmer may swim in a Prone or Supine position. Arm stroking is not permissible. Standing on the bottom of the pool for the purpose of resting is permissible but no walking or jumping is permitted,
  - c) Finish – the finish will take place when the kick board touched the pool edge at the finish line, or when some part of the swimmers body touches the pool edge at the finish point. The swimmer must have one hand on the board at the finish.
- 4) Score:
- a) Athletes will be timed from the starting whistle to when they touch the end of the pool.
- i. Assisted Swim – This transitional event is intended for use by those athletes who are not ready to participate fully in the competition experience, but need to gain experience in the competition environment itself. In the case of athletics or swimming, examples of competition environment are: staging, the start gun or horn, spectator noise, volunteers, etc. Athletes registered in these transitional and non-advancing events are ineligible to register and participate in any other event or sport during the season. Host Regions will determine how these transitional events will be implemented during existing tournaments. Contact your host Region for details.

## 2. General Rules

### a. Relay Events

- 1) No swimmer may swim more than one leg in any relay.
- 2) Relay team members must come from the same delegation and be one of a maximum of six swimmers listed on district and state relay rosters.
- 3) There shall be four swimmers participating on each relay team for each relay race.
- 4) A swimmer may not start until his/her preceding teammate finishes his/her leg.
- 5) At the discretion of meet management, each relay member may not be required to leave the water immediately after finishing his/her leg.
  - a) Considerations may include, but are not limited to: location of the bulkhead, whether or not the departing athlete will impede another athlete, physical ability of a swimmer to leave the water from his/her own lane.

- b) Relay members unable to exit the water must align themselves within their lane, to the opposite side of the oncoming swimmer and may not impede the lane next to them.
    - 6) Athletes registered for two relays may only be entered once in each relay event.
  - b. Freestyle Relay
    - 1) Four swimmers shall each swim one-fourth of the race distance using any desired stroke.
  - c. Medley Relay
    - 1) Four swimmers shall swim one-fourth of the race distance using the following order: backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly and freestyle.
  - d. Unified Relays
    - 1) Each Unified Sports relay team shall consist of two athletes and two partners.
    - 2) Swimmers on a Unified Sports relay team may be assigned to swim in any order.
3. False Starts: Any swimmer starting before the starting signal has been given shall be disqualified. If the starting signal sounds before the disqualification is declared, the race shall continue and the swimmer or swimmers shall be disqualified upon completion of the race. If the disqualification is declared before the starting signal, the signal shall not be given, but the remaining swimmers shall be called back and start again.
  4. Athletes may start (dive or jump) from the pool deck or in the water. No use of starting blocks is permitted.
  5. Athlete attire: Athletes must wear proper swimming attire as outlined by USA Swimming Rules and Regulations. Athletes may request swimwear modifications through a Special Needs Form. If permission is granted for a uniform modification, the athlete must wear the same uniform for preliminaries and finals (if a t-shirt is worn for preliminaries, it must also be worn for the final). Goggles may be worn.

## **SECTION C – SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

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

1. Basic Rules
  - a. There shall be at least one certified lifeguard on duty for every 25 swimmers in the water.
  - b. The sole function of the lifeguard shall be to guard. A lifeguard may not be engaged in any other activity while performing his/her duty as a lifeguard. If a coach is also a trained lifeguard, he/she may not coach and guard at the same time.
  - c. If no relief lifeguard is available, the pool must be emptied even for short durations when a lifeguard must leave the pool side.
  - d. The head coach or event director will review the emergency action plan prior to each occasion.
  - e. Athlete medical history forms shall be on site and shall be discussed with the lifeguard or medical personnel on duty in advance of the aquatic activity.
  - f. Pool depth must be marked and easily visible.
  - g. Starting blocks shall not be utilized at any level of competition.



- h. The minimum depth of the pool shall be at least 1.22m (four feet) for racing starts from the side of the pool (deck start). No springboard diving is allowed.
  - i. Safety lines must be in place to divide shallow and deep water areas during recreational aquatic activities.
  - j. A pool facility shall not be used unless a satisfactory inspection rating is received prior to any Special Olympics athlete entering the water.
2. 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:
- a. The procedure for obtaining emergency medical support if a medical doctor, paraprofessional or medical support is not present.
  - b. The posts and areas of responsibilities for each lifeguard.
  - c. The procedure for obtaining weather or weather watch information, particularly if the event is outside.
  - d. The procedure for reporting accidents.
  - e. The chain of command in case of a serious accident, including who is assigned to talk to the press.
  - f. Other items as may be required by local jurisdictions.
3. 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:
- a. Recreational Programs:
    - 1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a ratio of guards to swimmers of 1:25.
  - b. Training Programs:
    - 1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a ratio of guards to swimmers of 1:25.
    - 2) Enough coaches (must be Special Olympics certified at State level competition) to provide for adequate supervision and training of each athlete.
  - c. Competitions:
    - 1) Enough certified lifeguards to provide a ratio of guards to swimmers of 1:25.
    - 2) Enough supervision to provide for a ratio of observer to swimmers of 1:2 for those swimmers who are prone to seizures.
    - 3) Enough supervision to provide for a ratio of observer to divers of 1:10.