

Use of swimming goggles during swimming lessons

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

The advantages of wearing swimming goggles during prolonged swimming activity to reduce or prevent eye irritation, to improve vision through the water and for medical reasons, are well recognised and supported by the ISRM and ASA. However, if the pool water is maintained in good condition, it should not be necessary to wear goggles if bathers are likely to be in the water for only short periods such as a swimming lesson for beginners.

The use of goggles is not without its downsides:

- Many swimming teachers have a concern, supported by much of the literature on the teaching of swimming, that goggles should not be worn when children are being taught to swim. It is considered that part of the learning to swim experience is for a child to be able to deal with splashing in the face and the ability to open his/her eyes whilst the face is immersed and swim under water with confidence. Certainly these attributes would improve the child's ability to cope in a water related incident in a canal, pond or river.
- A further concern relates to the goggles themselves; there is a history of eye accidents firstly as a result of goggles being made of glass or breakable plastics and secondly during the putting on and taking off of goggles. There is a British Standard for the manufacture of goggles and the Standard includes the requirement that the packaging of the goggles should contain instructions regarding the putting on and removal and the possibility of an accident occurring if the correct procedures and care are not followed.
- Lastly not all goggles provide a watertight fit and in a teaching situation with small children, concentration and lesson time can be lost in trying to obtain a fit which leaks as little as possible.

It is difficult to provide guidelines to meet all situations but the ISRM/ASA advice is as follows:

- There are good reasons why swimming goggles should not be worn during swimming lessons; children and their parents/carers should be informed of these and children encouraged to take part in lessons without the use of goggles.
- It is recognised that for some children, however, medical or associated reasons necessitate the wearing of swimming goggles in order to participate and in these cases carers/parents should:
 - only purchase goggles that meet British Standards,
 - ensure that the goggles fit the child correctly,
 - ensure the child has received adequate instruction, prior to participation, as to the fitting and adjustment of goggles,
 - be aware that teachers will not be responsible for the fitting of goggles to the children.

British Standard BS 5883:1996 "Specification for surface swimming goggles" gives further detailed information in this area.