

## **Water Activities Policy**

Specific procedures for water activities are provided as they can pose significant risk. All participants will have specific information in their Support Information if swimming involves a greater risk for the individual than normal safety procedures.

Please note that swimming in murky water significantly raises the risks associated with water based activities.

This policy relates to all services of Interchange Outer East where Interchange has responsibility of the participant or the conduct of the activity. For those programs where families or a parent of the participant are present and Interchange does not have responsibility of the participant, it is the families' or parents' responsibility to provide supervision when using a facility outside of a designated program time of operation.

Definitions:   Swimming – where the depth of the water is deeper than the waist of the participant  
                  Paddling – where the depth of the water is less than the waist of a participant  
                  Water Craft – any craft that floats and is able to support a person on top of the water (includes blow up toys, mattresses, canoes) – See Attachment 1

The following requirements are to be followed when undertaking any aquatic activity.

### **General Requirements for Swimming & Paddling**

- Ideally water activities are to be conducted in specified areas (pools, between the flags, roped off areas, etc)
- Where no area is specified staff must ensure the area is safe and set parameters for the activity. This involves checking the area for hazards and setting boundaries for where people can undertake the water activity.
- Under no circumstances should aquatic activities be undertaken in areas where swimming is not advised (unpatrolled surf beaches, signed areas where swimming is not advised, etc)
- For activities involving any water craft all participants are to wear a life jacket (PFD type 1 – see Appendix 1) at all times.
- When working 1: 1
  - Swimming in open water venues must only occur where a lifeguard is present.
  - Paddling is acceptable but only in calm water venues and where no specific requirements for swimming have been noted in the Support Information.

- Paddling and swimming at surf beaches can only occur between the flags and where lifeguards are present.
- Swimming in backyard pools is able to be undertaken as long as it is agreed to by the family.
- For group based activities
  - A staff member must be in the water with participants at all times and one staff member/nominated volunteer should act as a spotter (aged 16 years+ minimum age) and watch from outside the water at all times, unless there is a lifeguard present.
  - The spotter's responsibility is to keep a lookout for all participants and ensure that people are safe. If the spotter becomes concerned they must raise the alarm with the staff member in the water to check the situation.
- Special care should be taken for participants who have a disability or medical condition which makes swimming risky (severe physical disability, asthma, etc). Please ensure you have read and understood the individual's Support Information

### **General Requirements for water craft activities**

- For all water craft activities that take place on open water (rivers, lakes, dams, beach) all participants must wear a life jacket (PFD Type 1 - see Appendix 1).
- For group based activities there must be one staff member / volunteer (aged 16 years+ minimum age) acting as a spotter on the bank/shore/boat, watching the activity at all times.

### **Specific requirements for supporting someone with epilepsy in water activities:**

- If swimming at venues where there are lifeguards present, the life guard should be informed of the individual having epilepsy.
- Conversations with individuals, their parents or guardians regarding the risk associated with the individual swimming must occur and be documented in epilepsy management plans prior to water activities.
- Epilepsy management plans must include details on any conditions or restrictions on water activities directly related to their epilepsy. These restrictions may include: 1:1 required whilst in the water, individual to wear a life jacket (PFD Type 1 – see Appendix 1), only to swim at public pools, etc.
- Within group based services considering the dynamics of the group is imperative. The amount of people with epilepsy in the group, whether their condition is controlled and the ratios available for water activities need to be taken into account to minimise risk. This is the responsibility of the specific program coordinator.
- A person with uncontrolled epilepsy should always be within an arm's reach away at all times while they are in the water. They are to be supported by a staff member or volunteer (aged 16+) who understands the risks and possible consequences. They must have read and understood the Epilepsy Management Plan prior to the activity.

The only time this is not required is when all parties (individual and their family, coordinator, recreation leader, support worker and or volunteer) have discussed the risks, are aware of possible consequences and have made an informed decision. This information is documented and signed off by the parent / guardian in the individual's Epilepsy Management Plan.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Personal flotation devices**

Victoria has requirements for wearing PFDs at certain times on recreational vessels. All occupants of the following vessels are required to wear a specified personal flotation device (PFD) when in an open area of the vessel that is underway:

- powerboat up to and including 4.8 metres in length
- off-the-beach sailing yachts
- personal watercraft
- canoes, kayaks, rowing boats and rafts
- pedal boats, fun boats and stand up paddle boards
- kite boards and sail boards
- recreational tenders.

All occupants of the following vessels are required to wear a specified PFD at times of heightened risk when in an open area of the vessel that is underway:

- yachts (including monohull, trailerable and multihull yachts, excluding off-the-beach sailing yachts)
- powerboats greater than 4.8 m up to and including 12 m in length.

When you are alone on a vessel, regardless of its type, you must wear a PFD at all times.

### **Are there different types of PFDs?**

There are several different types of PFD, with varying levels of buoyancy. PFD types 1, 2 and 3 are personal flotation devices that comply with the requirements of the Marine Regulations 2012(Vic).

A PFD type 1 is a recognised lifejacket and will provide a high level of buoyancy and should keep the wearer in a safe floating position. They are made in high visibility colours with retro-reflective patches.

- A PFD type 2 is a buoyancy vest – not a lifejacket. It will provide less buoyancy than a PFD type 1 but is designed to keep your head above water. Like a PFD Type 1 they are manufactured in high visibility colours.
- A PFD type 3 is a buoyancy garment – not a lifejacket. They have similar buoyancy to a PFD type 2 and are manufactured in a wide variety of colours.

### **PFDs on children**

Children under the age of 10 must wear a specified PFD at all times on any vessel, regardless of size, when they are in an open area of the vessel that is underway.

Further information may be obtained at Transport Safety Victoria Advice

<http://www.transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety/recreational-maritime/safety-equipment/personal-flotation-devices>