

COVID-19 Pandemic and its impact on aquatics

Disclaimers:

- **This position is current as at 4pm (AEST) on 18 March 2020**
- **Our position must be considered against our remit as a national peak body, with a key focus on reducing drowning and promoting safe aquatic participation**

Royal Life Saving is closely monitoring the COVID-19 Pandemic through official sources including the Australian Government Department of Health, and State/Territory Government Departments of Health websites and advisories.

The Prime Minister has today announced a ban on non-essential gatherings of 100 or more people indoors. The Prime Minister and State Ministers have also forecast a six-month period of disruption while public health authorities work to control this disease and its impacts.

The Prime Minister and Cabinet Statement has since been published and should be read in full. The extract below includes content in relation to swimming pools. That content reads:

“Settings like gyms, indoor fitness centres and swimming pools are not required to close at this time providing they meet these requirements for social distancing and hand hygiene. Such venues should take actions to ensure regular high standards of environmental cleaning take place”

“...Social distancing and hygiene practices should include;

- being able to maintain a distance of 1.5 metres between patrons.
- hand hygiene products and suitable waste receptacles need to be available, with frequent cleaning and waste disposal.

The full statement can be found here <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/update-coronavirus-measures>.

Some Local Government Councils have moved to close aquatic and recreation facilities, bring forward winter closures for seasonal swimming pools, others are implementing a range of approaches to achieve social distancing requirements.

This is a challenging time for many working or relying upon the Aquatic Industry. It is an industry that makes a substantial contribution to community health and wellbeing.

Royal Life Saving research identifies that:

- there are more than 1,077 aquatic facilities, the majority owned by local councils
- there are more than 1,176 swim schools, including many small businesses
- the aquatic industry sector employs approximately 67,000 frontline workers
- almost half of the workforce is casual and about three-quarters are female
- approximately 70% of the workforce live within 15 kms of their workplace
- approximately 1.5 million children 0-14 years participate in organised swimming (lessons, coaching) outside of school programs every year
- we estimate more than 106 million individual pool visits annually
- aquatic facilities provide many social, economic and health benefits to Australians of all ages

We fully appreciate that responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic will continue to cause significant concerns, disruption and uncertainty for the workforce, operators and small businesses in the sector.



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Public health and safety is paramount and all Government directives in relation to bans on indoor gatherings and social distancing measures must be followed. The following must not over-ride that advice, nor should it be interpreted as health advice.

Royal Life Saving makes the following statement:

1. At this time, Royal Life Saving State and Territory Members, who conduct training and education services, are closely monitoring the situation and recent changes in advice
 - At this point they will continue to provide vocational training that is deemed essential, subject to constant review of Federal, State and Territory policies
 - They are preparing for a time when that may not be feasible
 - Many face to face non-vocational and community education programs have been cancelled
2. Federal, State and Territory Government guidelines will be monitored and followed in relation to any school or community education programs
3. Royal Life Saving is working with our Members to increase access to existing online courses as well as bringing forward development of other workforce and community modules that may be completed during any period of self-isolation or industry closures.
4. Royal Life Saving commits to reviewing, in consultation with the National Aquatic Industry Safety Committee, all impacts on aquatic facilities, including but not limited to:
 - Qualification and accreditation requirements for staff, including renewal periods and assessment requirements
 - Risk assessment and business continuity measures
5. Royal Life Saving commits to activating its staff and resources to engage stakeholders, collect and analyse data, and prepare for eventual industry redevelopment plans. We anticipate that this will include the potential for:
 - Widespread surveys and other research methods seeking to track, measure and anticipate the impacts, identify needs, and develop turn-around plans
6. For those Aquatic Facilities and Swim Schools who, following a thorough risk assessment, remain open through this period:
 - We reinforce the importance of following official advice of the Departments of Health at Federal, State and Territory Levels, especially in relation to hygiene, water quality and social distancing
 - We reinforce that swimming pools are dynamic and social environments which may present opportunities for close social interactions and surfaces which may present elevated risk for disease transmission. These risks must be considered
7. Royal Life Saving urges Governments at all levels to:
 - consider the financial impacts of job losses occurring across the aquatic industry workforce in the context of any support being developed in pending and future stimulus packages
 - consider the vulnerability of the charities; and small and medium businesses that operate swimming pools and conduct swimming lessons; and ensure that business support packages are made available to these entities, such as:
 - practical and immediate financial support measures
 - future training assistance packages that will be required to ensure that facilities have a workforce that can meet community needs
 - It is essential that the workforce and facilities are ready to quickly re-activate after the period of uncertainty, and leading into Summer 2020/21

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At this difficult and evolving time, it is essential that we all follow public health guidance provided by Governments at Federal, State and Territory levels.

We will endeavour to keep you updated. We are focused on staff and community welfare.

Justin Scarr

Chief Executive Officer

We declare the following:

- Our Members deliver education and training services to schools, pools and community
- Two Members operate public aquatic centres
- Two Members operate a total of 3 swim schools
- We receive Government funding which supports our efforts to develop industry safety guidelines
- We love aquatics, are committed to industry and community safety is paramount