

General Advice for Open Water Lifesaving

Lifesaving Activity

In the Survive & Save programme there are two strands that take place in Open Water; Beach and Stillwater. For these awards the techniques and skills are first learnt in the swimming pool and only then applied to an open water setting. Experiencing open water is considered important to ensure candidates appreciate the challenges presented by this environment.

Open water venues are selected and assessed for their suitability for lifesaving activity and sessions are structured to ensure candidates, whilst exposed to the conditions, are as comfortable as possible.

Because of the dynamic nature of the open water/open air environment there may be occasions where sessions are cancelled at short notice (or even mid-session). Where this happens the club will.....

Candidate briefings

Before entering the water candidates will always be given a thorough safety briefing explaining the activities they are about to undertake and what to do if they require assistance and what they should do in case of an emergency.

Clothing

Open water activity is usually cold no matter what time of year and candidates need to be aware that they should always have warm clothing available to change in to after their swim (even on a sunny day). It is advisable to ensure that you bring a warm hat as well as spare top and a wind/rain proof jacket.

Swim kit

Apart from the obvious swimsuit RLSS UK advise that all candidates for open water lifesaving awards wear a wetsuit. It is very rare that water temperatures are high enough to be comfortable without a wetsuit. On day where the air temperature is high RLSS UK advice is to make sure that wetsuits are only zipped up a few minutes before entering the water (this to avoid heat exhaustion).

For the Survive and Save “survival swim” candidates are required to wear a long sleeved top and trousers, it is recommended that this clothing is “unwanted or old” and is close fitting without restricting movement.

All candidates are required to wear a swim hat and wearing two hats gives extra thermal protection. NB Please ensure that at least one of these hats is a high visibility colour and that the Hi-Viz cap is worn on the outside.

Protective footwear is always a good idea, neoprene socks are ideal as are waterproof beach shoes (you can always take them off when you know the site is clear).

Dry Bag/Wet Bag

It is a good idea to bring a dry bag with you to protect your dry kit when you are in the water and then carry your wet gear home without soaking the car etc! Kit soaked in open water usually has an unpleasant odour so make sure it is washed thoroughly before the next session. Always rinse wetsuits in clean water!

Food and Drink

It is not a good idea to eat just before swimming but equally you should not be hungry before wading in. Make sure you eat and drink as normal during the day but try to avoid eating for at least an hour before entering the water. NB you can carry on drinking normally.

It always a good idea to have some food and drink available to refuel soon after the activity has finished. NB Remember to wash your hands in soap and clean water before eating.

Other bits and pieces

Whilst we are focused on the relative cold of open water, these sessions are run in the warmer months. Candidates especially those with fair skin should bring sun cream for protection on warmer days. Also candidates with allergies or other medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes or epilepsy should list these on the medical declaration/parental consent form and make sure they bring any medication that might be required.

Facilities available on site

The following facilities are available on site:

1. Changing room?
2. Showers?
3. Toilets?
4. Food & drink?

Medical concerns

Every effort has been made to ensure the site chosen is suitable for Open Water Activity, however it is impossible to ensure that there is a complete absence of potential pathogens.

There are simple practices that lifesavers should be advised to adopt to minimise the risk of infection.

1. Cover cuts and abrasions, however minor, with sticking plasters. You should not consider swimming if you have deep cuts.
2. After swimming wash hands with soap in fresh water before eating.
3. Take a full shower at the earliest opportunity.
4. Try not to ingest water while swimming.
5. All swimming kit (wetsuit, costume, goggles, hat etc) should be washed in clean water and thoroughly dried prior to the next session/event.

Always seek medical advice if you fall ill immediately or a few days after swimming in open water.