

WORLD WATERPARK ASSOCIATION AQUATIC FACILITY AND WATERPARK REOPENING CONSIDERATIONS

THE WORLD WATERPARK ASSOCIATION and its members have made the safety of waterpark guests and employees our number one goal. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has closed aquatic facilities around the world, is a significant challenge to this goal. By working with public health officials, waterpark operators are developing strategies to successfully protect the health and safety of their guests and staff as local Shelter in Place and Safer at Home orders are lifted and reopening commences.

The information provided in these considerations is designed to help operators develop reopening action plans that meet the needs of their facilities and the requirements of their local public health officials. Much of the information presented is drawn from available public health guidelines and links to useful resources are provided at the end of the document.

This public health crisis has been fast moving, with rapid changes in understanding of the virus, its effects and public health responses to it. The WWA recommends operators look to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) as trusted sources for up to date information on the virus, maintain an awareness of recent medical advances and work closely with their state and local public health officials while they develop their reopening plan.

GOVERNMENTAL REOPENING GUIDELINES

On April 16, 2020, the White House unveiled phased guidelines that provide direction on the reopening of the United States. State Governors, both individually and in groups, have also published guidance specific to their state or region on the process of reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, many federal and state agencies are issuing guidance, rules and regulations pertaining to the reopening process.

These considerations are based on the phased opening approach common to federal and state guidelines, but operators must ensure they are compliant with the most current information provided by their public health and governmental officials.

COMMUNICATION

In any crisis, communication is key. In order to reopen, operators must have systems in place to share information with their employees and guests in an accurate and timely manner. Consideration must be given to these key topics:

STAFF -

- Changes to the hiring and training process.
- On-boarding and orientation procedures.
- Operational changes to enhance employee protection and mitigate their risk of exposure.
- Policies and procedures to protect guests from exposure to COVID-19.

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GUESTS -

- Changes to existing park policies that enhance protection of guests and employees.
- Operational changes that impact the guests' use of the facility.
- Actions guests can take to decrease their potential exposure to COVID-19.
- Development of pre-visit and on-park message delivery systems such as websites, advertising, signage and employee direction to ensure guests understand what is expected of them while at the facility.

STAFF TRAINING & PROTECTION

The revised operating procedures required to reopen a waterpark at this time will require specific training of all staff to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and able to protect themselves and guests from exposure to COVID-19. Public health officials will expect parks to have plans in place that detail this training and be able to show it has been completed by all appropriate employees.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has developed *Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID_19*. This document provides guidance employers can use to reduce the risk of employees' exposure to COVID-19 as they perform their jobs.

First responders, including lifeguards and EMS workers, face unique challenges while performing their duties. Special consideration must be given to these challenges to protect their safety and the safety of park guests. Facility operators should ensure they have followed the directions of their lifeguard certification / licensing agencies and the medical directors that oversee their EMS personnel. If an operator has specific questions on required training or procedures needed to protect first responders, they should contact their lifeguard certification / licensing agency or medical director for guidance.

Employees who have direct contact with guests will require training on required precautions they must follow while meeting guest service standards and direction on how to prioritize the safety of themselves and the guest during interactions.

Employees who have no guest contact, but come in contact with co-workers must also receive training on employee protection policies to reduce employee to employee exposure to COVID-19.

Despite proper adherence to training and operational procedures, employees may come into contact with fellow employees or guests who have contracted COVID-19 and tested positive for the virus or are presumed positive by a medical provider. All employees must be trained on the protocol and steps to follow when they or another employee or guest present with symptoms or a diagnosis of COVID-19.

CAPACITY

The objective of Shelter in Place and Safer at Home orders is to slow the spread of COVID-19 by reducing person to person contact. As these orders are lifted and people venture out, many public health jurisdictions will require increased physical distancing, smaller group sizes and phased increases in the capacity of guests as a condition of reopening.

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It appears many public health jurisdictions will require capacities of 50 percent or less on initial opening with increases phased in over time as local conditions warrant.

Park operators should determine the best method for their particular facility to calculate guest capacity to meet required physical distancing guidelines. Common methods used, such as 36 square feet of space per person, are based on physical distancing guidelines of 6 feet or 2 meters. However, these guidelines are subject to change, so operators should be prepared to recalculate park capacity as needed to remain in compliance with health officials' phased reopening guidelines.

Facilities should also prepare for capacity limits in particular buildings, structures or attractions that may be more stringent than overall park capacity guidelines. Water attractions such as wave pools, lazy rivers, activity pools and children's play structures will likely require capacity densities that may be less than decks and walkways to provide for compliance with physical distancing guidelines.

SCREENING

Reopening action plans should include procedures to screen employees and guests for COVID-19 symptoms before they enter the facility. All screening should be done in a manner consistent with current social distance guidelines and PPE protocols.

Self-screening methods for guests and employees can be promoted and facilitated by providing information on the signs and symptoms of the disease before they arrive at the park and while on-site. Any person exhibiting COVID-19 signs or symptoms, as listed by the CDC, should not be allowed to enter the facility. Examples of appropriate signage are available from the CDC. Parks should consider distributing this screening information through multiple communication channels to both employees and guests.

Temperature checks have been identified as a possible tool to screen employees and guests. At present, this is not mandated by the CDC, but it may be required by the facility's state or local public health officials. Parks should evaluate this tool in conjunction with their local officials and determine if it is appropriate for their facility. If temperature checks are used, appropriate social distancing and PPE use must be followed.

As part of their screening efforts, facilities should also promote regular hand washing and hand sanitizing by guests and employees. Making additional hand washing / sanitizing stations available, promoting their locations and the best practices for their use will increase the effectiveness of this tool.

The park should also provide information on the proper response of guests and employees who develop signs or symptoms of COVID-19 while they are in the park and what to do if they develop these symptoms after they have worked in or visited the park.

Employees who are not feeling well or show signs or symptoms should follow the CDC's guidelines regarding self-isolation, medical treatment and eventual return to work. Employers should not pressure an employee who exhibits signs or symptoms of COVID-19 to work or request the employee visit a medical provider or obtain a release to return to work.



PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing is a cornerstone of the public health response to COVID-19 and should be maintained by park employees and guests while they are at the facility. The CDC currently recommends a 6-foot / 2-meter separation be maintained between people whenever possible.

Individuals from the same household who are in regular contact with each other can be counted as a family unit for the purposes of physical distancing.

Effective communication with guests and employees on the importance of physical distancing through signage, training, barriers and other methods such as labeling and marking on grounds and attractions will increase the effectiveness of this effort.

Physical distancing requirements need to be applied to interactions between employees and guests, as well as interactions between multiple employees or multiple guests. Many facilities will need to make modifications to their operating procedures in order to support increased physical distancing.

Operators will need to determine capacity limits that are compliant with physical distancing guidelines in common areas such as pool decks, attractions and their queue lines, food service outlets, retail outlets, bathrooms and changing facilities, admission areas and entry queue lines, season pass processing facilities, first aid stations, maintenance and operations areas, administrative offices, employee break areas and all other areas where guests and employees congregate.

In order to meet physical distancing guidelines, it will likely be necessary to reduce the number of chairs and tables on pool decks and in food outlets to ensure proper spacing between guests. Facilities may need to limit access to or close portions of their guest and employee lockers, bathrooms, work stations, turn styles, ticket windows and cashier stations. Limits may need to be placed on individual ride vehicle capacity and policies developed to limit personnel contact with guests in ride dispatch areas and first aid stations without compromising safety of guests or employees.

Policies that cluster employees by shifts or other means may limit the spread of COVID-19 among staff if an employee should work while contagious. Adoption of new technologies and changes to park operational procedures that reduce guest and employee interaction, such as pre-purchased ticketing and contactless payment methods will reduce potential virus exposure.

Facilities should also develop physical distancing procedures for third-party contractors, outside maintenance personnel and deliveries of packages and supplies. These policies should provide protection for employees and outside personnel of all types.

PPE

Waterpark operators are familiar with the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by employees in many positions throughout their parks, from EMS and lifeguard staff to maintenance and food service personnel. Reopening guidelines designed to stop the spread of COVID-19 require increased use of PPE by both staff and guests.

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Common PPE that may be useful to waterparks include face masks, face shields, gloves and gowns. Facilities will need to establish training and operational policies for all types of PPE they introduce for their employees. Parks should also consider providing direction through signage and other means on the proper use of PPE for guests who bring or buy PPE at their park.

The CDC currently recommends that people wear face coverings when they are in public to slow the spread of the virus by asymptomatic individuals. For park operators, this means both staff and guests should wear face masks whenever possible. The addition of facemasks throughout the park may require changes to established policies.

In many positions, the addition of face masks for employees will have little impact on operations, but if there are concerns about employee safety, facilities should coordinate with their local public health officials for guidance.

One area of particular concern to operators is the use of face masks in and around the water. Operators should coordinate with their lifeguard licensing / certification agencies and their EMS medical directors for guidance on the appropriateness of face mask use by these professionals, as well as their recommendations on guest use in and around the water.

In addition to face masks, parks will need to establish protocols for use of gloves, face shields, gowns and other PPE they utilize in their operation. These policies should address appropriate selection, training, use, sanitization and/or disposal of all PPE categories at the facility.

CLEANING & SANITIZING

As parks welcome back staff and reintroduce guests and outside vendors, it is possible that persons who are infected with COVID-19, especially asymptomatic individuals, will enter the facility. In addition to physical distancing and proper use of PPE, it is critical that a formalized plan for cleaning and sanitization be developed, implemented and revised as needed.

Reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by cleaning and disinfection is an important part of reopening public spaces and will require careful planning. The CDC has detailed guidance on the development of this plan, the procedures used to clean and sanitize and the chemicals that are effective against the virus.

The CDC has stated that:

- Coronaviruses on surfaces and objects naturally die within hours to days. Warmer temperatures and exposure to sunlight will reduce the time the virus survives on surfaces and objects.
- Normal routine cleaning with soap and water removes germs and dirt from surfaces. It lowers the risk of spreading COVID-19 infection.
- Disinfectants kill germs on surfaces. By killing germs on a surface after cleaning, you can further lower the risk of spreading infection. EPA-approved disinfectants are an important part of reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19. If disinfectants on this list are in short supply, alternative disinfectants can be used (for example, 1/3 cup of bleach added to 1 gallon of water, or 70 percent alcohol solutions).

REDUCING THE RISK OF EXPOSURE TO COVID-19 BY CLEANING AND DISINFECTION IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF REOPENING PUBLIC SPACES AND WILL REQUIRE CAREFUL PLANNING.



It is important to remember that staff engaged in cleaning and sanitizing are at increased risk of exposure to the virus and must wear appropriate PPE for this job. They must also receive training in the use of EPA-approved disinfecting chemicals to ensure they are only used according to their labels.

As operators develop their plan, determine if any furniture, fixtures or other items can be removed from the operation to reduce frequent handling or contact from multiple people.

The CDC recommends different cleaning procedures for hard, non-porous materials and soft, porous materials (including materials that require laundering). Though every facility will be different, the CDC has prepared a list of common examples of frequently touched surfaces and objects that will need routine disinfection following reopening:

- tables,
- desks,
- gas pump handles,
- doorknobs,
- phones,
- touch screens,
- light switches,
- keyboards,
- ATM machines,
- countertops,
- toilets,
- handles,
- faucets and sinks,

Using this list as a guide, operators should survey their facility and add additional items, with a focus on frequently touched areas that should be included in the facility cleaning and disinfection plan, such as ride vehicles, inner tubes, life jackets and rental keys. If appropriate, this cleaning and sanitizing plan should be area and / or department specific with training provided to all individuals responsible for cleaning.

The CDC has also stated that outdoor areas generally require normal routine cleaning and do not require disinfection. Spraying disinfectant on sidewalks and in parks is not an efficient use of disinfectant supplies and has not been proven to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to the public. Operators should maintain existing cleaning and hygiene practices for outdoor areas.

Finally, the CDC has determined there is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can spread directly to humans from water in pools, hot tubs or spas or water play areas. Proper operation, maintenance and disinfection (for example, with chlorine or bromine) of pools, hot tubs or spas and water playgrounds should kill the virus that causes COVID-19.

THE CDC HAS DETERMINED THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES COVID-19 CAN SPREAD DIRECTLY TO HUMANS FROM WATER IN POOLS, HOT TUBS OR SPAS OR WATER PLAY AREAS.

POSITIVE / PRESUMPTIVE POSITIVE RESPONSE

Because of wide community spread, it is possible that a symptomatic individual may be identified during the facility's pre-admission screening or an asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic guest or employee may develop the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 while in the waterpark.

In order to limit additional exposure of employees and guests, facilities should develop policies to respond to symptomatic individuals on their grounds; including employee training, notification of appropriate public health officials, procedures on the use of PPE to protect first responders, isolation procedures of suspected COVID-19 patients, notification to EMS personnel that they are responding to a potential COVID-19 patient, cleaning and sanitization of areas the suspected COVID-19 patient accessed while in the facility, procedures for employees who may have come in contact with a suspected COVID-19 patient and follow up with the suspected COVID-19 patient.

Coordination with state and local public health officials may be helpful in the development of suspected COVID-19 patient policies and best practices.



DISCLAIMERS

The guidance in this document is based on governmental and industry best practices at the time of writing. It does not constitute legal advice. Because the COVID-19 pandemic is a rapidly evolving public health crisis, operators should always follow the most current governmental and public health guidelines applicable to their jurisdiction.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The WWA maintains a COVID-19 resource page at www.waterparks.org/coronavirus with curated content on the novel coronavirus, business support & continuity, operational information and educational content.

Additional COVID-19 information can be found at the following links:

White House Opening Guidelines:

www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19:

www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf

National Institutes of Health:

<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus>

Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2:

www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2

Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html?deliveryName=USCDC_2067-DM26911

General Business Frequently Asked Questions:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/general-business-faq.html>

Water and COVID-19 FAQs:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/water.html

Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19):

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>



How to Protect Yourself and Others:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html

Using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/using-ppe.html>

Use Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow Spread:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Return-to-Work Criteria for Healthcare Workers:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/return-to-work.html>

Identification of Healthcare Workers and Inpatients with Suspected COVID-19 in non-US Healthcare Settings:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/non-us-settings/guidance-identify-hcw-patients.html>

Best Practices for Retail Food Stores, Restaurants and Food Pick-Up/Delivery Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/best-practices-retail-food-stores-restaurants-and-food-pick-up-delivery-services-during-covid-19#employeehygiene>

Johns Hopkins University of Medicine:

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

