

Swimming – Risk Management Protocols

Swimming at locations off campus does occur in UVM programs – ex: orientation trips, SGA club activities. Typically, we have limited knowledge of participant swimming abilities, and our trip leaders are not trained in water safety and rescue. Due to these concerns, we provide this resource to support conservative swimming in our programs. Whenever possible, a designated swim area with lifeguard supervision is recommended. Without those in place, we recommend program organizers to focus on these essential items – Site Selection, Supervision, Conservative Swimming.

Site Selection

- **Choose a safe site:** Factors that contribute to a safe site:
 - non-moving water – avoid current, strong waves, undertows,
 - shallow depth
 - clear of obstacles such as strainers,
 - easy entry and exit, ex – sandy beach vs muddy bank or slippery rock.
 - consider water and air temperature, weather, and remoteness.
- **Stay near shore and in shallow water.** Without lifeguard supervision, swim in water that is shallow enough for the swimmer to stand up in at all times. Water depths should not exceed shoulder height of swimmer. Added caution is needed in waves/wind/current where students should remain in conservatively shallow water.

Supervision

- Swimming during UVM programs should be supervised and occur with others, for safety.

Supervision should include thorough analysis of the venue for hazards. The leader who supervises will remain on land, in view of the swimming venue, and should have a flotation device that can be thrown to anyone in need. PFDs, flotation cushions, and rolled foam pads are acceptable flotation devices for wilderness settings.

Always swim with a buddy. For privacy when bathing, such as on a wilderness program, an appropriately safe water body (shallow, easy entry/exit, non-moving) while maintaining a vocal distance for emergencies is acceptable.

Conservative Swimming

- **Protect the airway:** Participants should always be able to expose their airway to air. Therefore - no diving, no swimming in water above shoulder depth, or less if the swimmer would be challenged to stand and take a breath.
- **Protect the head:** Diving, Pothole jumping or high-speed “otterslides” should not occur during UVM programs.
- **Protect the feet:** All backcountry swimming requires footwear. In the backcountry, a wounded foot could prevent that person from finishing the trip and may require a supported evacuation. Frontcountry (road-accessible) swimming does not require footwear

Rescue Guidelines

If you have not been trained in water rescue, do not enter the water to assist a drowning patient. Throw a flotation device first. Additional flotation, or stuff sacs, with attached line can become a towing device.

Cold Water immersion

UVM Risk Management cautions against “Polar Bear Swims” or any purposeful swimming in water that significantly increases the risk of cold shock or hypothermia. Please contact RM.

Life Jacket Policy -- Life Jackets (PFDs) must be worn by all leaders and participants in any watercraft (details in boating section). If entering the water from a watercraft, PFDs must not be removed. Deep swimming with PFD is allowed, and can be quite fun!

