

Dog Swim Events at Public Swimming Pools

State Regulations



What is a dog swim event?

A dog swim event is usually a 1-day event that allows dogs to swim in public pools. It is usually held on the weekend at outdoor public pools near the end of the summer operating season after public use and before the winterization cleaning process. These events are sometimes operated in conjunction with a group to raise funds.

How does state law apply to dog swim events?

Allowing dogs to swim in a public pool does not comply with state law [Wis. Admin. Code § ATCP 76.29(1)(a)] which states, “The operator shall post pool use rules governing safety and sanitation and shall enforce those rules.” In addition, general pool rules [Wis. Admin. Code § ATCP 76.29(1)(b)(5)] states, “Do not bring animals into the pool area.” The restriction of animals in the pool area is intended to promote safe water quality and prevent the possibility of spreading disease from animals to people who would be swimming in the pool.

Common misconceptions:

- ‘Dog swim events do not apply to state law (Wis. Admin. Code § ATCP 76) because the pool is closed for the operating season.’ If a pool is closed this would mean all areas applicable to the pool license must restrict public access, gate and/or doors would be locked, and a pool closed sign would be posted. Pool areas include the entire pool enclosure and other buildings or structures that are regulated under the pool license which include the pool basin, pool deck, showers, bathrooms, etc. Even though the general public may not be swimming in the pool during the event, they are still within the pool enclosure and have access to the pool area.
- ‘If the pool is closed for the season the licensing requirements do not need to be met.’ A valid pool license is in effect year round, therefore, the facility must comply with state law whenever the public pool provides public access.

What are the public health or safety concerns?

The following are potential public health risks associated with dog swim events:

Disease transmission: Some diseases are caused by organisms that can be transmitted from dogs to people. When it is possible for animals to transmit a disease to a person, this is referred to as zoonotic. These diseases are bacterial, protozoan, fungal, viral, or parasitic. They can be transmitted by dog feces, blood, saliva, urine, or other secretions and can infect people through numerous routes like ingestion, direct contact, inhalation, and vectors such as fleas or ticks. During dog swim events, people can be exposed to contaminated surfaces like the pool deck, grassy areas, general facility, and through the water of the pool basin. Most zoonotic diseases are killed quickly by the disinfectant that is present in the pool but there are more resilient pathogens like giardia and cryptosporidium that may infect people and cause vomiting and diarrhea. For additional information about zoonotic diseases related to dogs, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.html>.

Physical injury: People have the potential to be injured physically by scratches, cuts, contusions, and punctures from dogs running, rough play, collisions, bites, or other physical contact during dog swim events. Openings of the skin can expose a person to a potential skin infection.

Drowning: A person may accidentally enter the pool and drown due to a collision from a dog, through loss of balance, or other means. A common obstacle noted during dog swim events is decreased water clarity due to suspended solids like dog hair and other debris from dogs. This may make the pool basin difficult to see or notice if a person is underwater that needs help and delaying their rescue.





How can I get approval to operate a dog swim event at a public pool?

If a licensed pool facility wants to operate a dog swim event, the legal licensee of the pool facility must submit a variance application and receive approval prior to the scheduled event. If the dog swim event is operated by a special group or charity organization, the group organizer may not submit the variance if they are not the legal entity responsible for the operation of the pool and do not hold the pool license. Without a variance approval, the event may not occur.

Where do I get a variance application?

Contact your state pool inspector for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) variance petition application (form number F-fd-20).

What does the variance application need to include?

Your variance application must pertain to the enforcement of the rule which restricts animals. You must also address the items listed in the section on the next page titled “Dog Swim Event Variance Application Information.”

How long does it take to hear back about the variance application?

DATCP has 30 business days upon receipt of a completed and thorough variance application to issue a written response of approval or denial.

What happens when the variance is approved?

An approved variance will indicate the specific conditions of the experimental approval that pertain to a specific facility and operation. The variance approval is valid for only one event. If DATCP obtains knowledge of new scientific data, a confirmed illness or outbreak, complaints, or noncompliance with the variance conditions relating to dog swim events, DATCP has the authority to revoke the variance, revise the variance conditions, or prohibit all dog swim events in public pools in the future.

What is the biggest complaint pool operators and industry members have about dog swim events?

DATCP has consulted with multiple pool operators and pool industry members who assist in the maintenance of pools that have held dog swim events in the past. The biggest complaint they had was the amount of additional time and effort it took to clean up after the event. Even though the pool will be closed immediately following the event, drained, and winterized, there is extensive additional time spent on cleaning the skimmers, gutters, pump baskets, drain covers, surge tanks, and filtration system that traps the enormous amount of dog hair or feces that is collected in and around the pool basin. Pool operators should consider this challenge when determining if they want to hold a dog swim event at their pool.

Where can I find more information?

- For more information or questions about dog swim events or the variance submission process, public pool operators should contact their inspector or email datcpdfsrec@wisconsin.gov.
- More information about licensing and pool regulations in Wisconsin, along with fact sheets, can be found at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/WaterRecreation.aspx.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also provides public health information for healthy and safe swimming that can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/index.html>



Dog Swim Event Variance Application Information

Unless otherwise noted, you must include all of the information below within your variance application (if needed, attach a separate sheet). You must address each item as it pertains to your facility and the event. These requirements state the public safety measures you will enforce during a dog swim event.



Dog Swim Event Details

- Dog swim event name
- Date and time of the event
- Name and contact information for any associated organizations or user groups involved (if applicable)
- Pool operator's name and contact information who will be responsible for enforcing the requirements



Attendees

- Aggressive dogs are not allowed. If a dog is observed to be aggressive, the owner must remove their dog from the premises immediately. Event staff must monitor dogs for any signs of aggression and enforce this rule. A response protocol should be in place in the event of a dog bite.
- Dogs that have an open cut, wound, or hair and/or skin condition are not allowed.
- Dogs that have had loose stools, were diagnosed with an illness within the previous two weeks of the event, or appear to be ill are not allowed.
- Dogs must not be physically forced to enter the water as this may create a situation where the owner may need to enter the water to retrieve the distressed pet.
- A maximum of one dog to every one owner. The dog owner must have control and oversight over their dog at all times.
- The owner is expected to follow the rules of the event. Failure to comply with the rules after being warned requires immediate dismissal from the facility.

Note: The following are suggestions to strongly consider to include in your application:

- Not suggested to attend:
 - Dog without veterinarian suggested vaccines.
 - Puppies under 12 weeks of age that do not have all of their vaccines as they are more likely to have internal parasites and have accidents in the pool.
 - Dogs that are weak, a non-swimmer, or that are fearful of water.
 - Young children, people who are immune compromised, or those fearful of dogs.
- The dog owner must adhere to any local, county, or state laws pertaining to the requirement of their dog being on a leash.



Facility Types, Features, and Design

- Outdoor pool facilities may operate the event only at the end of the operating season. Patrons are prohibited from pool use until the next operating year.
- Indoor facilities are prohibited from operating dog swim events due to accessibility of entry/exit of an indoor public facility for non-service animals in public areas, the amount of required cleaning time, the absence of convenient relief areas for dogs.
- Splash pads are prohibited due to the potential for the inhalation of contaminated water.
- Whirlpools are prohibited due to the negative health risk associated with high temperatures.
- Spray features of a pool may not operate. Similar to splash pads, there needs to be a minimized potential risk of people coming in contact with or inhaling contaminated water as much as possible and the use of spray features makes that difficult.
- Any other attractions such as slides, play features, or diving boards are also prohibited. You must confine the dogs to the pool basin area. Barricades and signage must be present on these features to restrict access to these features.
- The outdoor pool enclosure should have an accessibly convenient and conspicuously marked grass area designated for the dogs to relieve themselves in order to assist in the prevention of defecation in the water or pool deck area. There must be proper supplies provided to the owners to clean up after their dogs. There must be an adequate number of receptacles that are conspicuously marked for disposing of dog waste.

- The facility must have all applicable rescue equipment available during the event. A shepherd's crook must also be immediately available and should be used to extract a distressed dog from the water rather than allowing a person to enter.
- All first aid supplies must be present during the event.
- A biohazard kit must be present and used during blood spill cleanup. It is common for dogs to damage their pads and may bleed on the pool deck.



Note: The following are suggestions to strongly consider including in your application:

- Pools without a zero-depth entry, shallow areas are encouraged to provide temporary custom ramps in multiple areas around the pool perimeter that assist the dogs with ease of entry and exit to avoid distressing the dog.
- Food or drink service must adhere to applicable food code requirements.



Operation and Supervision

Dog swim events require numerous staff to operate in a safe and healthy manner. Whether that is through the registration process, cleaning up fecal or blood contaminants, supplying lifeguards, or trying to keep people out of the pool. A lot of the staff are most likely going to be involved with the charitable organization and would be considered volunteers.

- All staff and volunteers must be thoroughly trained on the topics addressed in this fact sheet prior to the event.
- Pool water is restricted to dogs only. **People must not enter the pool water**, even up to their ankles. No other animal species are allowed. Multiple signs must be posted around the pool during the event. The signs must communicate 'No human entry.'

- The event is restricted to one day only.
- There must be a designated operator who is present during the entire event and is responsible for ensuring the requirements are met.
- Any reports of complaints, illnesses, outbreaks, or incidences must be reported to datcpdfsrec@wisconsin.gov within 24 hours of the event.
- Pools over 2,000 sq. ft. are required to staff lifeguards during the event. There must be an adequate number of lifeguards who have the ability to clearly see all areas of the pool basin. The lifeguards must have a scanning zone that gives them the ability to identify a victim and rescue a person at the furthest point of the scanning zone within 30 seconds. Lifeguards should also be concentrated in higher risk areas such as deep water. Lifeguards are only responsible for the safety of people, will not perform distracting duties (such as picking up fecal accidents), and will not enter the water to assist a distressed dog. If a lifeguard has to enter the water to rescue a person, the lifeguard must immediately shower afterwards with soap and water.
- Attendees must understand the health and safety risks and the rules of the event through verbal or written communication. This can be achieved through signage, information on a registration website, flyers handed to owners during check-in, or announcements during the event.

Note: The following are suggestions to strongly consider to include in your application:

- Breaks are recommended to be scheduled periodically throughout the event to allow a period of rest for the dog and owner and give the dog an opportunity to use the designated relief area.
- The event should be well publicized to the staff, public, local media, social media, etc. and include information about the health and safety risks, instructions and rules of the event so owners will arrive knowledgeable and understand the expectations. Educational materials and posters can be available to the staff and the public to learn about the risks of disease and injuries associated with dogs and the methods of prevention.
- The following types of staff or volunteers are suggested to be present during the event:
 - Veterinarians or technicians that can evaluate the dog's health, treat injuries, and perform CPR in the event of an emergency situation.
 - Behavioral trainers to monitor dog behaviors and aggression.



Water Quality

Basic water quality is required in order to reduce the potential for transferring animal diseases to people.

- The operator is required to test the pool water for chlorine, combined chlorine, cyanuric acid (if applicable), and alkalinity. The operator must wash their hands with soap and water immediately after testing.
- The pool water must be tested and recorded on the monthly operating logs at the following times:
 - One day before the event
 - Immediately before the event
 - At least two times during the event
 - And immediately after the event

- A copy of the monthly testing logs with the results of the water quality, must be submitted to datcpdfsrec@wisconsin.gov within 24 hours of the event.
- Depending on the number of dogs in the pool, the volume and size of the pool, and the duration of the event, the pool water will become cloudy. The facility is required to monitor the clarity of the water and close the pool if the water becomes turbid and the lifeguard can no longer adequately see the bottom of the pool.
- The circulation system must be operational within 12 hours of the event. The circulation system must be turned off during the event to avoid dog hair and feces from entering into the filters.
- The water level must be at an adequate level **below** any skimmers, gutters, trench drains, etc. to prevent the potential for the contaminated water containing dog hair and feces from entering the circulation system.
- The operator must maintain the free chlorine disinfection level at a level of at least 1 ppm.
 - If cyanuric acid is present, the cyanuric acid must not be above 30 ppm and the minimum chlorine level must be at least 2.0 ppm.
 - Not required, but highly recommend: The chlorine level should not be at an elevated level as it may cause harm to the dogs.
- The pH levels must remain above 7.0 and below 7.8.
- If the pool water cannot meet the minimum chlorine levels or within the range for pH, the pool must be closed until the desired level is achieved. Hand feeding of chemicals is not allowed.
- A preventative approach for the promotion of water quality is through the removal of hair, dirt, dander, feces, and other contaminants that may be present on the dogs by thoroughly rinsing the dogs off in a location that is separate from the shower facilities before they get into the pool water. Dogs may not be allowed in the shower facilities for this activity. The facility must supply means of rinsing the dogs at no charge.
 - Not required, but highly recommend: This is also a valuable service for rinsing the dog off after the event to remove any residual pool chemicals or contaminants that may be harmful to the dogs.
- The pool basin, deck, and all areas associated with the pool facility must be maintained in a clean, safe, and sanitary condition. Adequate staff must be available to monitor these areas in order to achieve this requirement.
- Fecal accidents in any area of the pool enclosure requires immediate response and must be removed with the appropriate equipment (scoop, net, bucket, bags, paper towel, and PPE such as gloves, etc.) and dispose of the contaminants properly.
 - Feces within the pool basin: Staff is responsible for using the appropriate equipment to collect and dispose of the contaminants.
 - Feces on the deck: Staff must use supplies to adequately collect the feces, dispose the contaminants, and use a diluted sanitizer such as a diluted bleach solution to sanitize the surface.
 - Feces in the grass: Supplies must be available to the owner to clean-up after their pet. If feces are noted in the grassy areas, staff must use supplies to collect the feces and dispose of the contaminants.
 - The entire pool perimeter area must also be inspected at the end of the event to verify absence of all feces.
- Prior to the pool reopening, the operator must thoroughly clean the pool basin, circulation system, and general enclosure. The pool water must be super-chlorinated prior to opening, following the CDC guidelines for a loose stool event.

Registration and Check-in

- A registration process must include documentation of the owner's and dog's name, owner's address, and contact information.
- Not required, but highly recommend: The owner should provide documentation or a license for a current rabies vaccination. Unvaccinated or unlicensed dogs should be prohibited.



Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Division of Food and Recreational Safety
2811 Agriculture Dr., P.O. Box 8911, Madison, WI 53708

<https://www.datcp.wi.gov>

dfers-frb-0164 (09/2019)

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