

# Allegheny County Pool Operator Guidance During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the green phase of the governor’s “Process to Reopen Pennsylvania,” swimming pools can open with some additional safeguards and restrictions in place to protect the public’s health. The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) is providing the below guidance as a tool to assist in complying with the CDC’s [Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19](#) as well as the state’s [Guidance for Businesses Permitted to Operate Safely During the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency](#).

**Health Department Notification:** Each facility shall notify ACHD of their intent to open or not to open for the 2020 pool season ASAP. This may be done either by phone at 412-350-4046, by email to [Jeff.OBrien@AlleghenyCounty.US](mailto:Jeff.OBrien@AlleghenyCounty.US), or by fax at 412-350-2792. If after a facility notifies the Health Department of their intent, they change that decision, the ACHD must be contacted with the updated decision.

**Calculation of Facility Capacity during Green Phase:** Each facility shall determine a maximum facility capacity during green phase. All staff members shall be included in the capacity counts.

Green phase facility capacity must be determined by using 50% of the calculated bather or user load for indoor facilities, and 75% of the calculated bather/user load for outdoor facilities. The bather load calculation is described in the 2018 International Swimming Pool and Spa Code (ISPSC) under Section 403 and the user load as described in the 2014 American National Standard for Public Swimming Pools Section 6.8. The below chart is from the 2018 ISPSC and shows how to determine the bather load for a facility.

2018 ISPSC® Code:

TABLE 403.1  
MAXIMUM BATHER LOAD

POOL/DECK AREA	SHALLOW INSTRUCTIONAL OR WADING AREAS	DEEP AREA (NOT INCLUDING THE DIVING AREA)	DIVING AREA (PER EACH DIVING BOARD)
Pools with minimum deck area	15 sq. ft. per user	20 sq. ft. per user	300 sq. ft.
Pools with deck area at least equal to water surface area	12 sq. ft. per user	15 sq. ft. per user	300 sq. ft.
Pools with deck area at least twice the water surface area	8 sq. ft. per user	10 sq. ft. per user	300 sq. ft.

For SI: 1 square foot = 0.09 square meters.

The deck is defined in the 2018 ISPSC as “An area immediately adjacent to or attached to a pool or spa that is specifically constructed or installed for sitting, standing, or walking.”

It is strongly recommended to review the figure that you come up with for your facility capacity to decide if it creates the level of protection that you would want to provide for your guests. The facility capacity can always be reduced below the figure you calculate from one of the methods above. Operators may be required to show facility capacity calculations to the Health Department inspector at the time of inspection as well as knowledge of the number of persons within the facility at any given time.

Here are some additional things to consider when thinking about your facility capacity:

- Think about the lane widths in lap pools. Restrict lanes to use by one person at a time
- Factor your deck space into your consideration
- Make sure to think about how the facility would be effectively evacuated in case of an emergency
- Make sure physical distancing guidelines can also be followed in locker rooms and other indoor spaces

And below are further recommendations on how to manage capacity:

- Establish a schedule with time slots that guests would be required to sign up for
- Mark sections/zones of the pool area to maximize separation
- Have enough staff on site to provide guest oversight and enforce the guidelines
- Designate separate entrances and exits if possible
- Screen guests for COVID-19 symptoms

**Additional Signage to be Posted:** Each facility shall post the following CDC Signage in highly visible locations (for example, at deck entrances and sinks):

- [How to Stop the Spread](#)
- [How to Properly Wash Hands](#)
- [How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)
- [How to Properly Use a Cloth Face Covering](#)

ACHD also recommends broadcasting regular announcements about how to stop the spread of COVID-19 on PA systems, as well as on social media accounts and websites. This [website](#) has the CDC's Public Service Announcements that are available for use.

**Physical Distancing Guidelines:** CDC guidelines currently define physical distancing as maintaining a six-foot distance between individuals. State guidelines require that physical distancing be maintained during all phases of the governor's reopening. While operating, each facility shall enforce physical distancing guidelines. Enforcement of physical distancing shall not be the responsibility of lifeguards who are actively guarding the pool. This enforcement may be done by other managers, off-duty lifeguards, or other facility staff.

\*\*Physical distancing requirements need not be enforced between household contacts (those quarantining as one unit). Should the number of household contacts exceed the green phase facility capacity, then only the household may utilize the facility without violating the facility capacity requirement. For example, if a bathing place has a green phase facility capacity of four (4) people, a household of six (6) may use the facility to themselves.

Recommendations on managing physical distancing:

- Place markings 6 feet apart in areas where people may tend to congregate
- Post plentiful signage about physical distancing and encouraging people not to congregate
- Spread deck chairs out so there is plenty of space between them and remove extra chairs from access
- Require full compliance with all staff instructions

**Shared Objects:** There must be a procedure put into place for cleaning and disinfecting objects that could be used by multiple groups of guests in one day, such as kickboards or pool noodles. There must be some way to identify the used objects that need to be cleaned, and which objects are ready for use by the next guest. It is best not to provide shared objects that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect, and that are meant to come into contact with the face, such as goggles or nose clips.

**Positive Guest Reported Guidance:** If a facility has a positive reported case, they shall follow guidelines from the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) (<https://www.governor.pa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200415-SOH-worker-safety-order.pdf>). This shall include but is not limited to:

- Closing facility for a minimum 24 hours
- Cleaning and disinfecting all areas
- Identify employees that were in close contact (within 6 ft for at least 15 min)
- Follow CDC guidelines for potential exposure

ACHD's Article IX also prohibits the use of a pool by anyone exhibiting clear signs of illness:

*Article IX: Section 920. Hygiene. B. No person with signs of illness or disease or with skin rashes or sores may enter the bathing place, bathing beach, hot tub or spa, except when certified by a physician to not have a disease in a communicable stage.*

**Pennsylvania Business Guidance:** State orders surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic must be followed and will be enforced by ACHD and others. Refer to the State's [Guidance for Businesses Permitted to Operate Safely During the COVID-19 Disaster Emergency](#) for an up-to-date list of those orders. These orders include but are not limited to: modifying hours so there is enough time for cleaning, creating barriers at registers and check-out areas where there cannot be proper physical distancing between customer and staff, making sure staff have access to soap, water, and hand sanitizer, and building in handwashing breaks for employees.

**PPE for Lifeguards and Staff:** Lifeguards and other staff shall follow CDC and PA DOH Guidelines for masking while on duty. Rescues and other responses to emergencies may require protocol changes to account for masking. Masks should **NOT** be worn while in the water. Masking of staff will be enforced by the facility.

**PPE for Guests:** CDC and PA DOH masking instructions should be practiced throughout facility, especially when moving around other persons. Masks should **NOT** be worn when in the water as a wet mask can be difficult to breathe through. Masking of guests will be enforced by the facility.

**Water Chemistry:** It has been confirmed by the CDC that the coronavirus cannot travel through water in well maintained bathing facilities. Each facility shall maintain the parameters set in ACHD Article IX:

- **Disinfectant:** Chlorine: 1.0 – 5.0 ppm (Ideal 2.0 - 4.0 ppm), Bromine: 2.0 – 10.0 ppm (Ideal 4.0 – 6.0 ppm)
- **pH:** 7.2 – 7.8

If the disinfectant for a bathing place drops below the minimum level, the water shall be evacuated immediately. At a minimum, the water must be brought back into the proper disinfectant range, but the Health Department recommends that the facility operator follow the below procedure to respond to a “*Fecal Response: Formed Stool*” before allowing swimmers back into the water.

Fecal Response: Formed Stool (NSPF Pool & Spa Operator Handbook)

1. Raise the free available chlorine level to 2 ppm (mg/L) and ensure the pH is 7.5 or less and a temperature of 77° F (25° C) or higher.
2. Maintain the chlorine concentration for at least 25 minutes before opening the pool.
3. Ensure the filtration system is operating while the pool reaches and maintains the proper free chlorine concentration during the disinfection process.