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Memorandum

From: Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Date: March 1, 2021

Subject: Safety Standards for Public and Semi-Public Swimming Pools - Phase III, Step 2

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) is providing guidance for the operation of public and semi-public¹ indoor and outdoor swimming, wading, and special purpose pools (including but not limited to hot tubs and whirlpools) at recreational facilities in Phase III, Step 2 of the Commonwealth's Reopening.

All public and semi-public pools must continue to meet the requirements of 105 CMR 435.00: Minimum Standards for Swimming Pools, State Sanitary Code: (Chapter V) in addition to any stricter state or local standard developed to control the transmission of COVID-19.

This guidance applies until amended or rescinded.

General Pool Guidelines

- ❖ Pool operators should review and follow the Commonwealth's [*Mandatory Safety Standards for Workplaces*](#), [*General Business Guidance*](#) for Reopening Massachusetts, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [*Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19*](#), and review the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [*list of disinfectants meeting EPA criteria for use against the novel coronavirus*](#). Pool operators should consult with venue designer in selecting a disinfectant.

¹ Pursuant to 105 CMR 435.00 a Semi-Public Pool means a swimming, wading or special purpose pool on the premises of, or used in connection with a hotel, motel, trailer court, apartment house, condominium, country club, youth club, school, camp, or similar establishment where the primary purpose of the establishment is not the operation of the swimming facilities, and where admission to the use of the pool is included in the fee or consideration paid or given for the primary use of the premises. Semi-public pool shall also mean a pool constructed and maintained by groups for the purposes of providing bathing facilities for members and guests only.

- ❖ According to the CDC, there is currently no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to people through the water in pools. Proper operation and maintenance (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in the water. Criteria for maintaining proper water chemistry, pursuant to 105 CMR 435.00, is noted in the section: *Maintaining Chemical Standards and Turnover*.
- ❖ The temporary shutdown or reduced operation of a building and reductions in normal water use can create hazards for returning occupants; these hazards can include mold and *Legionella*. After a prolonged shutdown, building owners and employers should ensure that their building does not have mold and that the water system is safe to use to minimize the risk of Legionnaires' disease. Guidance on how to do this is available from the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html>.
- ❖ Consider operating hours set aside for high-risk populations (e.g. adults 60 years or older).

Social Distancing

- ❖ Recreational activities, including swimming and wading, should be conducted with adherence to social distancing recommendations of 6 feet between individuals and the proper use of face coverings while outside of the water in public settings. Organized swimming programs should ensure compliance with the [*Workplace Safety and Reopening Standards for Businesses and Other Entities Providing Youth and Adult Amateur Sports Activities*](#).
- ❖ Swimming lessons that require contact are allowed in Phase III, Step 2. Prolonged close contact should be minimized to the extent it is possible and safe to do so.
- ❖ Face coverings are required for all workers and customers in accordance with COVID-19 Order 55: [*Revised Order Requiring Face Coverings in Public Places*](#) to prevent against the transmission of COVID-19. Face coverings should not be worn while in the water (diving masks, goggles, and snorkels may be worn)
- ❖ Social distancing of at least 6 feet is required for all individuals outside of a household group and applies to deck areas, bathrooms, locker rooms, and wading areas. No one should congregate in the water or on the pool deck.
- ❖ Pool operators, taking into consideration bather load, any building occupancy limits, and social distancing on deck areas should manage capacity to accommodate social distancing to the greatest extent possible, such as setting a maximum number of individuals that can be in a pool facility or pool area at one time. This number should not exceed 50% of existing facility capacity.
- ❖ Hot tubs and whirlpools should be closed.
- ❖ Locker rooms and changing areas may open for swimmers but should be limited to 50% capacity. Pool Managers should ensure that users can abide by capacity restrictions and social distancing standards and are encouraged to establish signage and visual guidelines. Signage should remind users to limit time spent in enclosed areas.

- ❖ Indoor and outdoor pool facilities must provide access showers in compliance with 105 CMR 435. If outdoor showers are not available, facilities may meet this requirement by providing access to indoor showers. If outdoor showers are available, facilities should keep indoor showers closed.
- ❖ Physical barriers such as plastic partitions, orange cones, rubber mats, tape and other easily cleanable products may be used to maintain social distancing.
- ❖ Consider using one-way signs on walkways and pool deck or visual guidelines for maintaining 6 feet distance in all restroom facilities to support social distancing and control flow of traffic.
- ❖ Make regular announcements or post clear signage to remind pool staff and patrons to follow social distancing guidelines.
- ❖ Facilities should limit the number and spacing of items of pool deck furniture on premises to maintain social distancing.
- ❖ Exceptions to the social distancing guidance include:
 - Anyone rescuing a distressed swimmer, providing first aid, or performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation, with or without an automated external defibrillator.
 - Individuals in the process of evacuating an aquatic venue or entire facility due to an emergency.
- ❖ Organized activities in the pool, such as events or tournaments, must comply with the guidelines in the [*Workplace Safety and Reopening Standards for Businesses and Other Entities Providing Youth and Adult Amateur Sports Activities*](#)

General Sanitation

Pool operators should clean in accordance with CDC Guidance: Considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/aquatic-venues.html>

- ❖ [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects each time they are used. For example:
 - Handrails, slides, and structures for climbing or playing
 - Lounge chairs, tabletops, pool noodles, and kickboards
 - Door handles and surfaces of restrooms, showers, handwashing stations, and diaper-changing stations
 - Consult the [*EOEEA May 18, 2020 Outdoor Recreation Facility Restroom Cleaning Best Practices Memorandum*](#), which details the standards and processes for the cleaning and disinfecting of certain outdoor recreation facility restrooms.
- ❖ Consult with the company or engineer that designed the aquatic venue to decide which [List N disinfectants approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency external icon](#) (EPA) are best for your aquatic venue.
- ❖ Limit use of shared furniture or objects to one individual or group of users at a time and clean and disinfect between use by different individuals.

- ❖ Set up a system so that furniture (for example, lounge chairs) or objects (for example, kickboards, noodles) that need to be cleaned and disinfected is kept separate from already cleaned and disinfected furniture or objects. Label containers for used equipment that has not yet been cleaned and disinfected and containers for cleaned and disinfected equipment.
- ❖ If provided, launder towels and clothing according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water temperature and dry items completely.
- ❖ Protect shared furniture, equipment, towels, and clothing that has been cleaned and disinfected from becoming contaminated before use.
- ❖ Ensure [safe and correct use](#) and storage of disinfectants and store them securely away from children.
- ❖ All handwash sinks shall be fully stocked with soap and paper towels.
- ❖ Water bubblers, fountains, and bottle filling stations can open. Managers are encouraged to install signs near any drinking equipment advising users to use for bottle refill only and not to touch the tap with their mouth or the mouth of their water bottle.
- ❖ Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol shall be available to staff.
- ❖ Ensuring safe and correct use and storage of EPA-approved List N disinfectant, including storing products securely away from children.
- ❖ Admission/entry transactions are encouraged, where possible should be carried out through a no contact process such as online reservations, timed-ticketing, permit/sticker issuance or an on-site electronic transaction method that allows for social distancing guidelines to be followed. If not feasible, hand transactions and cash may be allowed.
- ❖ In order to manage capacity and allow for social distancing, operators may consider limiting the time individuals or groups are allowed to use pool facilities.
- ❖ Pool users may use personal floatation devices (PFD) that are U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved. PFDs cannot be shared. PFDs provided by the facility should be [cleaned in accordance with the USCG guidance](#).
 - No other equipment brought from home, such as pool noodles, inflatables, lounge furniture and toys, are allowed into the facility. However, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) approved equipment for personal use is allowed.
- ❖ Pool operators are strongly encouraged to include strategies to reduce COVID-19 exposure to the pool staff and patrons according to the following best practice guidance from CDC:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Ventilation

Operators are required to maintain the facilities in accordance with CDC's guidelines found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/aquatic-venues.html>

- ❖ Ensure ventilation systems of indoor spaces operate properly.
- ❖ Increase introduction and circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to staff, patrons, or swimmers.

Signs

- ❖ Post signage at each public entrance to inform all pool staff and patrons that they should:
 - Stay home if sick or in quarantine. Avoid entering the premises if symptomatic, e.g., a fever of 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit or above, unusual coughing, shortness of breath, headaches, chills, shaking chills, sore throat, muscle aches or pains, new loss of taste or smell, or whether they have felt feverish.
 - Maintain 6 feet separation between individuals, except for in household groups.
 - Sneeze/cough into cloth, tissue, elbow or sleeve. Discard tissue in trash cans
 - Avoid hand shaking or physical contact except among household members.
 - Wash hands often with soap and warm water, and for at least 20 seconds.
 - Wear a face covering while not in the water.

Staff Procedures

- ❖ Staff must receive training about social distancing and general sanitation best practices. Conducting training virtually or ensuring that social distancing is maintained during in-person training.
- ❖ Staff should complete a self-assessment for symptoms and stay home if sick.
- ❖ Operators are encouraged to develop protocols to assess staff at the beginning of each shift and ask if they have experienced unusual coughing, shortness of breath, headaches, chills, shaking chills, sore throat, muscle aches or pains, new loss of taste, or smell or whether they have felt feverish.
- ❖ Anyone that develops a fever or symptoms, such as a cough or difficulty breathing, should not perform their work duties until they have obtained medical advice from a health care provider.
- ❖ Require workers who test positive for COVID-19 to disclose to the workplace employer for purposes of cleaning / disinfecting and contact tracing. If the employer is notified of a positive case at the workplace, the employer shall notify the local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town where the workplace is located and assist the LBOH as reasonably requested to advise likely contacts to isolate and self-quarantine. Testing of other workers may be recommended consistent with guidance and / or at the request of the LBOH.
- ❖ Require frequent handwashing by staff, with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers or disinfecting wipes to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- ❖ Operators must log visitors with appropriate contact information and make that information available upon request by state officials, LBOHs or their authorized agents.

- ❖ All out-of-state visitors coming into Massachusetts must be informed of and follow the Massachusetts travel order.

Maintaining Chemical Standards and Turnover

According to the CDC, there is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to people through the water in pools. Proper operation and maintenance (including disinfection with chlorine and bromine) of these facilities should inactivate the virus in the water. Water Chemistry testing kits used by the facility should be in accordance with 105 CMR 435.30. In addition to meeting the minimum standards of 105 CMR 435.00, and in order to maintain safe swimming conditions, the Department is recommending:

- ❖ Increasing the frequency of water chemistry testing to a minimum of 6 times per day for all swimming, wading, and special purpose pools. Additional testing should be conducted during peak bather load periods.
- ❖ Increasing pool shocking frequency each week during hours of pool closure.
- ❖ Ensuring swimming, wading, and special purpose pools meet the minimum turnover requirement specified in 105 CMR 435.00.
- ❖ Operators and Supervisors should close immediately for maintenance and correction if the water chemistry does not meet minimum standards. All closures, maintenance, and corrections must be documented.

Lifeguards and Water Safety

- ❖ Lifeguard staff who are actively monitoring pool safety should not be asked to monitor handwashing, use of face coverings, or social distancing of others. Other staff should be assigned this task. Lifeguards must wear a face covering while out of the water if social distancing cannot be maintained and limit any close contact with other people to emergency situations.

Communication Systems

- ❖ Put systems in place for:
 - Responding when staff, patrons, and swimmers self-report they have symptoms of COVID-19, a positive test for COVID-19, or were exposed to someone with COVID-19 within the last 14 days.
 - Notifying local health authorities of COVID-19 cases that have been brought to their attention.
- ❖ Provide online and other means of communication to alert pool staff and patrons to any pool status updates or changes, such as closures to maintain social distancing and general cleaning practices.