

Dog Swims

Dog swims are special events where an aquatic facility allows domestic dogs (pets) to enter a public swimming pool to wade, swim, and participate in activities. These types of events are growing in popularity and often are used as a fundraiser for local animal shelters or to support or update dog parks within the community.

While some states have specific rules which prohibit animals from entering a public swimming pool, the Iowa Swimming Pool and Spa rules do not specifically address animals. The pool patrons include all guests of the facility, be they human or animal. The use of the pool by animals does not relieve the facility owners and operators of any of the requirements of the rules. Please note however that as animals are introduced into the facility they introduce additional risks that were not anticipated or addressed through the Iowa Swimming Pool and Spa rules.

These events generally use the aquatic facilities much differently than the original design intended. If a dog swimming event is scheduled, the pool owners and operators should take steps to mitigate the additional risk of illness and injury to the people using the facility.

The purpose of these guidelines is to highlight some of the additional risks associated with allowing dogs into public swimming pools and to provide recommendations to help mitigate the risk of illness or injury.

Dog swim events at public swimming pools can increase the risk for the transmission of zoonotic diseases. The following are some of the diseases/conditions of dogs that have the potential to cause illness if transmitted from dogs to people at a dog swim. More information on these can be found at the [CDC's Healthy Pets, Healthy People](#) website.

- Intestinal Infections and Internal Parasites: Campylobacter, Salmonella, Cryptosporidium, Giardia, Hookworm, Tapeworm, Roundworm
- Skin Conditions and External Parasites: Dogs can carry ticks and fleas and some of these external parasites do carry diseases or can cause skin reactions that affect humans that include: Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Lyme disease, Ringworm, Sarcoptic Mange
- Other Zoonoses of Dogs: These are infrequent to rare, but can be very serious infections of both dogs and humans. Brucella canis, Leptospirosis, Rabies

In addition to concerns about illnesses, dogs at dog swims can cause injuries to people including but not limited to bites, scratches, and collisions. Dogs can become aggressive on leashes, around unfamiliar dogs, or if panicked in the water. When dogs are not constrained by a leash they may be difficult to control and may run around the pool deck, potentially colliding with people. Many dogs are not good swimmers and their owners could be at risk of drowning if they attempt to save a dog struggling in the swimming pool. Public swimming pools are designed for people and the ladders and recessed steps found in many pools do not provide for easy egress for dogs.

The various features commonly found at public swimming pools are also designed for people. Dogs should not be permitted to use features including but not limited to starting blocks, diving boards, swimming pool slides, or waterslides as these features increase the risk of injury if misused and manufacturers have very specific rules for their safe use and did not design these features for dogs who lack the cognitive abilities to read and understand the rules needed for the safe use of these features.

Operating Requirements

The use of the pool by animals does not relieve the facility owners and operators of any of the requirements of the Iowa Swimming Pool and Spa rules. Swimming pools shall be operated in a safe, sanitary manner as required by Section 15.4 including but not limited to:

- The swimming pool recirculation shall be operated continuously in accordance with 15.4(1)"b."(1). The swimming pool shall have a means for skimming the pool water surface in accordance with 15.4(1)"b."(4).
- The water quality and testing must be completed and logged in accordance with 15.4(2). The swimming pool water shall have a free chlorine residual of at least 1.0 ppm, an ORP of at least 700 mV, and all parts of the sides and bottom of the pool must be clearly visible from the pool deck including the main drain/s.
- The equipment for the continuous feed of chlorine shall be operational in accordance with 15.4(3)"a."(1).
- Lifeguards shall be provided in accordance with 15.4(4)"d.". The lifeguard staffing plan shall include staffing assignments for all programs conducted at the pool in accordance with 15.4(4)"m." including the staffing plan during dog swim.
- Decks shall be maintained slip-resistant, and free of litter, obstructions and tripping hazards in accordance with 15.4(4)"k."(1).

Recommendations for Dog Swims

- A dog swim should only be held at an outdoor pool with grassy areas accessible for dogs to defecate and urinate. The event should only be scheduled at the end of the operating season allowing an extended shutdown to clean any remaining waste from the decks and grassy areas, and to clean the pool, refill it with fresh water, and hyperchlorinate before reopening the following season.
- Cleaning grassy areas: Remove as much of the fecal material as possible and dispose of properly. Some parasites, such as roundworm eggs can remain infectious for months in soil, posing a possible risk to people walking barefoot, eating in the area.
- People may wade in to their knees but should not be fully submerged or swimming in the pool with the dogs. This is the best way to prevent the dogs from transmitting diseases to or injuring the people.
- All dogs should be registered for the event with the owner's name and address and vaccination history. All age appropriate vaccinations should be current. Aggressive dogs, dogs with obvious infections or diarrhea, or dogs in heat should not be allowed. Each dog should be accompanied by a separate handler.
- Dogs should be hosed off before allowing them to enter the pool. This will remove excess hair, dirt, feces, urine, etc. to reduce the contamination of the swimming pool.
- In addition to lifeguards, staff should be present who are trained to monitor dog behavior and to recognize dogs in distress as the dogs could become aggressive, injuring staff or guests.
- Recommend following CDC guidelines for [fecal incidents](#) and [bodily fluids on pool deck surfaces](#) whether the fecal or bodily fluids are from the people or the dogs as both can transmit disease.

For additional information, please contact John Kelly at 515-724-9961 or Mindy Uhle at 515-499-1395.