

Managing Periods and School Swimming Lessons

Why does this need to be considered?

For many, the general topic of 'periods' will be considered taboo and it therefore presents a barrier to physical activity. Nowhere is this more apparent than at the swimming pool. As school teachers within a swimming environment, we have the opportunity to utilise relationships built in the classroom to break down these barriers.

Learning to swim has a multitude of benefits, from increased safety around water to the positive impact on mental and physical health and wellbeing. Therefore, we have a responsibility to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to participate. In 2022, Women in Sport reported that seven out of every 10 teenage girls would avoid being active when on their period. Pain, fear of leakage, tiredness and self-consciousness were all referred to as significant barriers.¹ We must therefore consider these when promoting the benefits of swimming and structuring our delivery.

Can a pupil attend school swimming lessons when on their period?

Yes – with a few simple considerations pupils can swim.

- Educating pupils with regards to how to manage their period when swimming should be included within PSHE and citizenship lessons in KS2.
- Pupils should be made aware that swimming temporarily reduces bleeding.
- Measures should be put in place to ensure that the pupil is comfortable and not embarrassed and has the knowledge to manage their period.
- Teachers should accommodate pupils requested toilet breaks before, during and after the session.
- Pupils should not be left waiting on the poolside before being allowed to enter the water for their lesson.
- Pupils should not be left waiting on poolside after their lesson.
- Pupils should bring a spare sanitary towel for after the swimming lesson.
- Teachers should ensure that sanitary products are available at the pool.
- Pupils should be informed that they cannot swim wearing a sanitary towel and that alternative measures should be in place. What can be worn is explained below.

¹ Women in Sport, Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls: Tackling Teenage Disengagement, 2022

Why Should Pupils Be Encouraged to Attend Swimming Lessons When on their Period?

- Attendance at school swimming lessons is extremely important – it may be the only opportunity the pupil has to learn vital swimming and water safety knowledge.
- If a pupil is absent from school swimming each time they are on their period, they will miss around a quarter of their school swimming lessons. School teachers should observe for patterns of behaviour and provide confidential support
- If the lessons are delivered in an intensive format they may miss all of their school swimming lessons.
- They will not have been taught how to manage their period when swimming, therefore this may become a long-term barrier.

What can be worn?

- A specific period swim costume or period underwear can be worn during swimming lessons. Period pants can be worn underneath a swimming costume or swimming leggings.
- Learners may wish to wear swimming shorts over the top of their costume or leggings.
- As learners get older they may choose to wear a tampon or menstrual cup for their swimming lessons.
- With regards to both swimwear and sanitary products, what is worn will be a personal choice to each individual. As teachers we must raise awareness of what is available, opening up access to aquatics well beyond the teaching environment.