ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# SNORKELLING

Schools must follow the Department’s Excursion Policy and Guidelines and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the activity must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

Snorkelling is an activity where swimmers use a mask, snorkel and swimming aids such as fins and weights, but do not use self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA). For activities using a self-contained underwater breathing apparatus, please see the SCUBA diving guidelines.

Snorkelling includes both snorkel swimming and snorkel diving. Snorkel swimming is conducted on the water surface only. Snorkel diving includes breath-hold diving for diving below the surface.

Note: Snorkelling does not include activities in a swimming teaching program where masks and snorkels may be used incidentally as part of a program.

If an overnight camping component is planned, please also refer to Camping guidelines.

## VENUE Definitions

Aquatic excursion supervision and qualifications in these guidelines are built around the following location type definitions:

**Swimming pools** – Any structure containing water to a depth greater than 300mm and used primarily for swimming, wading, paddling or the like including a bathing or wading or spa pool. (AS1926.1 – 2012). This definition includes all public, private, school, body corporate, hotel and natural swimming pools if clearly defined.

**Inland waterways** – inland waterways can be dams, lakes, reservoirs and very slow flowing rivers with no swift water features. Inland waterways may have widely varying depths, water visibility, turbidity, temperatures and hazards.

**Enclosed waterways** – are any declared port waters by Maritime Safety Victoria and include areas such as bays, non-surf beaches, channels, inlets and estuaries. See the [Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook](http://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety/recreational-vessel-operators/powerboat/victorian-recreational-boating-safety-handbook) for all listed port waters.

**Coastal inshore waterways** –include all beaches with direct access to ocean waters, any beach exposed to ocean swell, and any beach that is exposed to currents, rips, strong winds or surf. This may include enclosed waterways at times with these features.

**Coastal offshore** – all waters greater than two nautical miles from the coast.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See Excursions Guidelines: Staffing for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher or an external provider, or a volunteer (See [Volunteers in Schools](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy) policy).

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity. An assistant instructor role may be filled by a volunteer (See: Volunteers in Schools Policy).

## Environment

In general, underwater visibility should be at least 3 metres and the bottom visible from the surface. The water surface should be calm with minimal or no ‘sea’ (the ‘chop’ of the water). Swell (unbroken waves) should be less than 0.5 metres. Stable weather conditions must prevail, with no obvious threat of a sudden change in weather that could significantly affect the safety of the activity.

Where possible, programs taking place at open coastal waterways should be conducted at patrolled beaches. Staff may find [Beachsafe.org.au](https://beachsafe.org.au/) a useful reference when planning activities in coastal waterways.

## Student preparAtion and skills

Activities should begin with an assessment of students’ current medical conditions, then assess knowledge, skills and experience in snorkelling and water (including their swimming abilities).

Students can be classified as either:

* **Beginner swimmers**

Students with little or no experience including in shallow water.

* **Intermediate swimmers**

Students with basic skills, able to swim 25 metres with a recognisable stroke.

* **Advanced swimmers**

Students able to swim 50 to 100 meters using two recognisable strokes and to demonstrate one survival stroke in deep water.

Schools must consider the swimming competency of students in particular water environments when deciding on the venue, staff-student ratio, risk management plan and emergency response plan.

The assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in the activity should be documented using [Documentation of Participant Preparation, Prerequisite Skills/Knowledge​ ​ (doc - 139kb)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc).

First time snorkelers and beginners must undertake competent instruction in basic skills, taking into account factors such as activity area conditions, weather and the progress of students.

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to control risks associated with the activity and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity and location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* relevant terminology.

##### Swimming pools

For snorkel swimming in swimming pools, students must be taught the basic water skills of submerging and resurfacing.

Snorkel swimming is appropriate for any age group, where individual students have demonstrated basic water competency.

Wetsuits suitable for prevailing water temperature must be worn. Students who are unable to float or swim competently should not wear weight belts but should wear a positive buoyancy aid.

Instructional staff must brief snorkel swimming students on:

* the dangers of separation from the group
* hyperventilation and hypothermia
* ‘squeeze’ in ears, sinuses, mask and lungs – the pressure–depth relationship
* techniques to equalise pressure in ears and mask air space
* clearing a flooded snorkel and mask
* entry and exit methods
* hand signals, for example, OK, not OK, distress.

All snorkel diving students must demonstrate competence in the snorkel swimming techniques above.

Instructional staff must brief snorkel diving students on:

* buoyancy concepts, including how to gain and maintain positive buoyancy, and as underwater depth increases, the effects on buoyancy with increase in pressure
* ditching a weight belt in the water in emergency
* surface diving techniques, including equalising the pressure in the ears when descending
* self-rescue techniques
* correct finning technique
* safety practices, such as the buddy system – responsibility for a diving partner where one dives and the other stays on the surface, i.e. ‘one up, one down’.

##### Inland, enclosed and coastal waterways

##### **Inland waterways**

In addition to the skills required for snorkel swimming and diving in swimming pools, students taking part in snorkelling activities in inland waterways must also be able to the designated instructor that they can competently demonstrate the following skills:

* a jump entry
* survival sculling, floating and treading water for five minutes, followed by a slow swim for five minutes
* feet-first and head-first surface entry
* floating for one minute using a flotation aid, then swimming continuously and efficiently for 200 meters using one or more recognised strokes.

##### **Enclosed and coastal waterways**

In addition to the skills required for swimming pools and inland waterways, students must have recently demonstrated the ability to swim 200 meters and demonstrated basic swimming and water safety skills, including:

* using a flotation aid as a support for one minute
* survival sculling, floating or treading water for five minutes
* waving one arm as if signalling for help
* the ability to submerge and resurface competently
* knowledge of marine dangers, for example, blue ringed octopus.

Students taking part in snorkel diving must be at least 12 years of age. Snorkel diving from a boat is not recommended for students under 14 years of age.

Appropriate wetsuits should be worn according to water temperature.

 [Documentation of participant preparation, prerequisite skills/knowledge ​ (doc - 139kb)](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc) can be used to record student preparation for the activity.

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, suitable for the activity and must meet applicable industry safety standards.

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##### Fins

Fins should be properly fitted and match the dive conditions.

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##### Masks and snorkels

Masks of tempered glass must fully enclose the diver’s nose. A variety of masks should be available to ensure a proper seal. Snorkels must be attached or attachable to the mask.

For snorkel swimming and snorkel diving, students must be positively buoyant at all times.

Wetsuits appropriate for water temperature must be worn. Before the activity, all snorkelling equipment should be checked to ensure:

* effective exposure protection, for example, wetsuits must fit correctly
* the snorkel is attached with a snorkel keeper, usually to the left-hand side of the mask
* masks have tempered glass and enclose the nose and seal correctly
* fins are properly fitted and suited to the conditions
* weight belts, if used for snorkel diving, have quick-release buckles. Note that snorkel swimmers must not wear a weight belt
* a student’s weight belt should be less than the weight required to achieve neutral buoyancy, so that students remain positively buoyant at all times
* snorkelling equipment is clean and disinfected between uses.

For all snorkelling activities:

* staff members should carry a whistle or other device for signalling to snorkelers and other staff.
* an assessment of the snorkelling location which includes water depth, type of water, existing rescue equipment on site and the ability of the swimmers. The assessment should lead to the identification of any additional non-contact rescue aids for reaching and throwing that need to be available during the activity. These might include flotation aids, poles and ropes, surfboards.
* the designated instructor must insure that divers’ flags and/or buoys must be used for all snorkelling activities in open water and displayed at the site at all times to indicate that there are snorkellers in the area or below the water surface.
* students with asthma must have medication for emergency treatment as close to them as practicable. If an inhaler is lost in the water, it is essential that a spare is immediately available.
* the teacher in charge must determine which participants are deemed to be at greater risk may be provided with greater buoyancy such as wearing a life jacket.

Under no circumstances are spear guns, hand spears, slings or knives to be carried or used by students.

## Clothing

Before and after the activity, students need to protect themselves from the sun with shirt and hat, and cold and wet weather with a towel and change of clothing, including a jumper, long pants and jacket. Sun protection clothing should be handy to students when they leave the water.

When snorkelling staff and students must be easily identifiable by boat operators and all students, for example, by wearing brightly coloured wetsuit hoods, rash vests or brightly coloured fins.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all foreseeable conditions.

The designated snorkelling instructor(s) must hold:

* documented snorkelling instructional qualifications and experience from a training provider or education institution, such as AQTF Outdoor Recreation Industry Training Package competencies which are documented by Outdoors Victoria, or equivalent (see: [Outdoors Victoria ­– Adventure Activity Standards](http://outdoorsvictoria.org.au/aas-list-of-standards/)).

The designated snorkelling instructor for swimming pool and inland waterway locations must hold one of the following:

* AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety Certificate
* Royal Life Saving Society Bronze Medallion
* Royal Life Saving Society Pool Lifeguard Certificate.

The designated snorkelling instructor(s) for enclosed and coastal waterways locations must hold one of the following:

* Surf Life Saving Australia Surf Bronze Medallion
* Surf Life Saving Australia Surf Rescue Certificate
* Life Saving Victoria Community Surf Lifesaving Certificate.

The designated snorkelling assistant to the instructor must:

* have experience in the activity at the level being offered to students
* be familiar with the requirements of the activity
* be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity
* have conferred with the instructor about the safety requirements of this role.

The designated assistant to the Instructor should hold at least one of the following qualifications:

* AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety Certificate
* Royal Life Saving Society Bronze Medallion
* Royal Life Saving Society Pool Lifeguard Certificate
* Surf Life Saving Australia Surf Bronze Medallion
* Surf Life Saving Australia Surf Rescue Certificate
* Life Saving Victoria Community Surf Lifesaving Certificate.

Note: Swimming in a pool using a snorkel, mask and fins may be part of a school swimming program. In such cases, the guidelines for swimming and water safety programs apply.

 [Documentation of staff qualifications and experience (doc - 151kb)](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/staffqual.doc) must be used to document staff experience and training in lieu of the listed qualifications.

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see: Excursions Guidelines – External Providers.

## Supervision

Supervision is a critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one with responsibility for activity instruction and the other able to assist the instructor.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, physical, mental and emotional maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-student allocation that must be used for snorkelling.

|  |
| --- |
| Inland waters |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | 1–20 |
| 3 | 21–30 |
| Inland enclosed waters and coastal waters |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 1 instructor and 1 assistant | 10 |

In general, it would be expected that staff members included in the ratios above would be supervising while in the water, unless prevailing conditions meant that assistant supervision would be more effective from a boat or the shore.

If there are not enough qualified staff to supervise separate groups of students who are to be involved in snorkelling, a plan to rotate students in and out of the water may be implemented in order to maintain safe supervisory ratios.

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with Excursions Guidelines – Supervision.

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Divers Alert Network <http://www.danap.org/index.php>

Outdoors Victoria <https://outdoorsvictoria.org.au>

Scuba Divers Federation of Victoria <http://www.sdfv.org.au/>

Scuba Schools International http://www.danap.org/index.php

Transport Safety Victoria – Maritime Safety <https://transportsafety.vic.gov.au/maritime-safety>

Victorian Public Pools Register [https://lsv.com.au/pool-safety-services/victorian-pool- register/](https://lsv.com.au/pool-safety-services/victorian-pool-%20%20%20register/)

Surf Life Saving Australia – BeachSafe <https://beachsafe.org.au/>

For further enquiries, please contact community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au

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