

Find out more about BCSSA and Summer Swimming.

Okay, you've taken the plunge, paid your registration fees, written your handful of cheques, committed yourself to volunteering, and took a brief glance at the practice schedule. Before you start having second thoughts about what you've gotten yourself into, read on and discover why thousands of parents register their children every year for summer swimming and keep coming back year after year.

What is competitive swimming?

Simply put, competitive swimming is both an individual and a team sport. Individually, each swimmer competes in events with other swimmers in his or her chosen events. The goal is not to win every single race, but to continually refine technique, as well as to develop the good mental preparation skills required for competition. Although it is nice to win, the goal is more about achieving personal best times. The team aspect is found in cheering on teammates in their races, and in relays, plus having a great summer family activity and making new friends that will last a lifetime.

How is 'summer' and 'winter' swimming different?

The summer swim season begins in May and ends in late August. Winter swimming begins in September and ends in late July. Many parents choose to enrol their children in summer swimming because the competitive season is only 3 ½ months long, and occurs primarily during the summer months. This allows their children to throw themselves into the sport during the summer, and allows them to participate in other activities during the school year.

Is summer swimming just as competitive as winter swimming?

Summer swimming has 2 tiers of competition, 'A' & 'B'. Swimmers compete in one of these tiers based on their times. Competition can be fierce at the 'A' level and every bit as competitive as winter swimming, sometimes more, as it gets closer to the Regional and Provincial Championship. The season is just much shorter.

What do summer swimmers do in the "Off-season"?

Most summer swimmers enroll in a winter maintenance program that their club runs. It is designed to maintain fitness and to continue to build the competitive skills needed for racing. All this is done in keeping within the BCSSA guidelines, which allows summer swimmers to swim a maximum of two 'coached' hours per week in order to maintain their summer or "S" status. Restriction of training time is necessary in order to level the competition field in the summer. A few swimmers, but not many, choose to swim more than the allotted two hours per week. If they do this, they will have to compete in the "O" category in BCSSA swim meets, alongside the winter swimmers. Winter swimmers do not have any restriction on training. We often get winter swimmers who train alongside summer swimmers. However, they compete in the "O" category because their training exceeds the BCSSA guidelines.

What is the BC Summer Swimming Association (BCSSA)?

BCSSA (British Columbia Summer Swimming Association) is an organization of member clubs that promotes the development of athletes in four aquatic disciplines: speed swimming, diving, water polo, and synchronized swimming. BCSSA provides opportunities for training, through the member swim clubs, and competition is organized by those same summer swim clubs throughout B.C. A highly competitive summer season runs from May 1 to September 30 followed by a restricted participation in these aquatic sports from October 1 to April 30. The organization was originally formed by three summer clubs who did not want to be a part of the Provincial Sport organization for winter swimming as they were strictly summer clubs. The organization was eventually incorporated as a BC society in 1967 and we have been regulated under the BC Society Act ever since. Today the organization has over 60 member clubs with a total membership of over 5000 athletes.

How many swim meets are there in the season?

There are swim meets virtually every weekend in June and July. Regionals take place on the first weekend in August, and Provincials two weeks later. There are also a few “developmental meets” for junior swimmers (Div 1-3), that take place during the week. These meets are designed to introduce new swimmers to competition in a friendly and laid back atmosphere.

Who organizes the swim meets?

Guess what.... Parents do! For each team's home meet, the parents within each club are responsible for booking the pool, sending out invitations to other clubs, and coordinating the various aspects of running a meet. This includes training people to work as deck officials, timers and at other various stations including crash desk, electronic timing, clerk of the course, marshalling, and concession. Parents also volunteer at the other swim meets their child attends, in many of these same roles.

Do parents have to work?

You bet! It's all done in fun and support of our children in this wonderful culture of summer swimming. You see, summer swimming, like other amateur sports, is run primarily through the support of the parents with a little help from the Provincial Sport Organization (in this case, BCSSA). Without parents doing most of the work, there would be no summer swimming.

What exactly do parents have to do?

There are many jobs that parents do within the organization of summer swimming. All of these jobs are well within your capabilities. All it takes is a willingness to learn and to participate. The club will provide all the training required for you to be able to perform competently. The rest is just practice and it really is not that difficult. Here is a list of jobs that clubs might ask you to help in:

1. Deck duties (timing & officiating)
2. Assisting with club socials
3. Assisting in the role of “group parent”
4. Assisting in the running of your own clubs meet
5. Assisting in fundraising for your club
6. Being on the Club Executive (Speak to your Club President if you're interested!!)

How do I become eligible to compete with BCSSA?

In order to be eligible to compete, you must show your birth certificate or BC Care Card, fill in a registration form and submit the appropriate fees to your club. During the season coaches will have meet entry sheets that swimmers must sign up on.

All swimmers are entered in swim meets on the basis of their age category and time qualifications. Most first-year swimmers begin in development meets, but are welcome to enter any meet that they are qualified to enter.

There are times set for each stroke and age group. These times are known as Regional 'A' qualifying times. A swimmer is not allowed to enter a 'B' event once they have achieved an 'A' time in an event. Many meets that are hosted throughout the province are A/B. This means events for 'A' swimmers, as well as 'B' swimmers will be offered. These meets can be run as two separate meets, with 'A' events following 'B' events. For more information on swimmers eligibility, take a look at the Administration section of the BCSSA rulebook, available on our website @ www.bcssummerswimming.com.

What is the difference between 'S' & 'O' status?

An 'S' swimmer is an individual whose participation in any organized aquatic activity between October 1 of the past year, and April 30 of the current year, has not exceeded two (2) hours in any calendar week (Sunday – Saturday) with the following exceptions:

1. Water safety, rescue or leadership programs offered by the Red Cross, YM/YWCA, Royal Life, etc.
2. School Physical Education programs or activities conducted for a maximum of six weeks as part of the curriculum of the school at which the swimmer is normally in attendance.
3. Participation in swimming activities for the specific purpose of competing in any swim meet recognized in the official program schedule of the Annual Swimming Championship organized by any School Athletic Association between October 1 and November 30. Training for the school meets cannot be carried out under the direction and/or supervision of a winter swim club.
4. Also, any winter swimmer who achieves a CASA National qualifying time in a non-BCSSA meet will be classified as an 'O' swimmer permanently.

For more information or if you don't know if your swimmer is an 'S' or 'O' swimmer, feel free to contact your Club Registrar or the BCSSA Provincial Office @ 604-473-9447.

What details can you give me about meets and tournaments?

Parents: please be aware that coaches cannot drive your child to and from practices, swim meets, or tournaments. The club has no insurance to cover damages in the case of an accident.

Meets are full-day activities, held at either indoor or outdoor pools. The majority of families bring their own tent or canopy (pop-up). Clubs try to setup their tents together, but it is on a first come, first serve basis for getting those precious spots so it is not unusual for the team to be scattered throughout the grounds. One solution is to arrive early and save spot for another family.

Families must be prepared for all weather. Bring an old sleeping bag to use in the tent. If it is cool, bring lots of warm clothes (fleece is good), extra towels and an extra change of clothing. If it is warm, bring sunhats, cover-up clothes and sunscreen!!!

Meets usually take most of the day, so bring books, games and activities to keep you occupied. Families should bring along food in the form of nutritious high-energy snacks and a light lunch. ***Greasy or junk food is not recommended for competitors.*** Please bring a water bottle and lots of liquids! Ideally, each swimmer should have their own cooler to store their food. Parents are responsible for their swimmers at all times. Coaches are working on deck at meets and are not expected to monitor children who have been dropped off at pools without designated caregivers on meet days.

What information do you have for new parents and swimmers attending a swim meet?

Programs are usually available for sale at or near the concession stand. Please listen to the announcer and watch the board at the Clerk of the Course to determine when you should report to marshalling for your event. Parents, please take your young children to the bathroom before taking them to marshalling for their event. Sometimes it is a half hour wait before your child actually enters the water.

Also, all swimmers should try to keep themselves warm in the marshalling area. You will perform better in your race. There is usually a basket for clothing behind the timers and recorders in each lane. At marshalling each competitor in an event may be given a card, pink for girls, blue for boys. This card tells the swimmer the event, which heat to swim in and which lane. Look after this card! In a cardless meet, the swimmers need to stay with the group of swimmers that he or she will be swimming with, as there is obviously no card. If you miss your heat and are not present at the block at the start of your heat, you will be scratched.

There will be either six or eight lanes in the pool; a swimmer will therefore sit on a bench with either five or seven other competitors if the heat is full, or less if it is not. A parent marshal will assist each swimmer to find the correct bench to sit on in marshalling with other children in the heat. Swimmers move along the benches when asked to do so.

When it is their heat's turn to approach the pool each swimmer hands their card (or not if it's a cardless meet) to the recorder, sitting between the timers at the end of the designated lane. Swimmers should not approach the blocks until the timers have finished timing the heat of swimmers ahead of them. After the race, swimmers do not leave the water until all swimmers in their heat have finished. Often, (but not in backstroke), the swimmer will be asked to stay in the water close to the wall until after the next heat of swimmers have started their race.

Can you give some helpful hints about a typical swim meet?

Races at swim meets typically start at 8:00am and end around 4:00pm depending on the size and format of the meet. If there are finals, they may continue until 6:00pm, or even later. Smaller meets will end earlier than larger meets (i.e.: North Vancouver Cruisers Hootenanny will end a little later). Virtually all meets will take place on Saturday and/or Sunday except a few development meets, which take place during the weekdays.

Warm up usually starts between 6:15 – 6:30am. All swimmers need to be on deck and ready to go 15 minutes before entering the water for stretching. Warm-up is generally mandatory. Swimmers may be scratched by their coach for the day if they miss warm-ups. If your coach has to wake up that early, so do swimmers.

There is parking at all sites. However, it is a good idea to get there early in order to claim a spot for your family in a strategic location so that you can have shade from the sun and/or a good view, especially if it is an outdoor pool.

As swim meets can last for a long time, it is important to pack wisely to ensure that your day will go smoothly. In terms of clothing, it is suggested that swimmers pack one towel per race, as well as extra bathing suit(s),

goggles, and dry clothes to change into. Warm clothes are essential as the weather does change over the course of the day. Pack rain gear or sunscreen, as the weather dictates.

Most facilities will have a concession stand but choice of food is limited and may run out by the middle of the day. Pack nutritious meals, snacks, and drinks for the entire day. A cooler is a good idea to keep food fresh and cold.

Swim meets may be long, but they are lots of fun. They are a lot like large family picnics! Because there will be lots of families and lots of tents, arrive a little early to claim a spot or two for the entire club family. Attending swim meets are one of the best ways to make friends and to get to know people in the club.

What do I feed my swimmer?

Swimmers should give careful consideration to the quality and quantity of their diet. The following are some guidelines for 'competition-day' food.

- Pre-competition meal (night before) should be a hearty nutritious meal.
- Small and frequent nutritious snacks are preferable to large meals on the day of competition.
- Try to eat at least two hours before getting in the water.
- Drink water beyond thirst requirements, as it is easy to become dehydrated during practices and meets.
- Suggested Snacks
 - Crackers with cream cheese or peanut butter
 - Bagels
 - Dried to fresh fruit
 - Yogurt
 - Applesauce
 - Nuts
 - Veggies and dip

What are relay teams?

Relay teams are made up of four swimmers, usually four girls or four boys from the same division. Sometimes a younger swimmer is asked to swim up a division. Parents and swimmers should understand relay teams are formed at the discretion of the coach. It is an honour to be chosen. The selection of teams is usually based on a combination of an individual's speed and skill. Factors such as sportsmanship, attitude and availability, as well as the formation of other relay teams, are also taken into account. Relays constitute the major team aspect of the club, and the total picture is considered in terms of what is best for the membership as a whole. It is possible to be on either the medley relay, the free relay team or both. Swimmers who have indicated they will attend a meet and who are chosen for a relay team should be aware of the disappointment their failure to show up for a meet causes the three other swimmers chosen for the relay team. There must be four swimmers on the team!

What time should I arrive at a swim meet?

You should plan to be on deck, in your swimsuit, cap and goggles, ready for warm-up time. Warm-up is not an option (except in certain instances; check with your coach). Your coach has to wake up early and be at warm-up, so you should be there too. Allow time to find the pool, find the entrance, find your coach, etc. all before warm-up!

What is a disqualification?

A disqualification happens to even the most experienced swimmers. It is a difficult way to learn, but necessary for swimmers new to competitive swimming. A disqualification can be called for infractions done at the start, during the swim, when the stroke or the turn at the wall is not executed correctly and these actions can be interpreted as giving the swimmer an advantage over others in that race.

If the infraction occurs during the race, the swimmer finishes and the time is recorded (but the time is not accepted as an official time). The deck official making the DQ must record it on a DQ Form or the swimmers card (if cards are used) and advise the swimmer or the coach within 15 minutes.

What are Regionals & Provincials?

The most important swim meet of the season for the highly competitive swimmers is the BCSSA Provincial Championships, also known as "Provincials." In order to be able to swim at Provincials, swimmers must qualify at the meet known as the BCSSA Regional Championships, also known as "Regionals." These are the two most important meets of the season. All other swim meets are essentially "practice meets," in which swimmers test their training, size up the competition, and prepare themselves to peak for these two big meets.

How many swim practices per week should I attend?

(This is a guideline so ask your coach for specifics.)

For swimmers in the top groups, it is recommended that they try to make all the scheduled workouts. Coaches understand that while school is in session, it can be very hard and not always possible. Swimmers must also understand, through, that the season is only 3 ½ months long and coaches need to have their swimmers come out to as many practices as they can, to get them into shape and ready to swim fast. Each workout usually has a different purpose with regards to physical and technical improvements, so if swimmers miss three or four workouts each week they lose out on these things and it makes it harder for them to improve.

For swimmers in junior groups it is recommended that they attend 60 – 100% of the workouts depending on how much they think they can handle. For younger swimmers, more training is not always better, so attending every workout is not always necessary. If you are a new member, do not feel the need to jump into 100% attendance right away.