

## Breastfeeding at Aquatic Facilities

Lifesaving Society Standard Approved by the Ontario Board of Directors, January 2024

### Standard

The Lifesaving Society supports a policy of “Breastfeeding Friendly – Anytime, Anywhere” in all aquatic facilities.

It is safe to breastfeed a child in and around an aquatic facility including on the pool deck, with the parent sitting on the edge of the pool or standing/sitting in the water.

### Background/Rationale

Breastfeeding in aquatic environments has been a much-discussed topic over the past decade. Information surrounding breastfeeding is often misleading and can create an uncomfortable and unwelcoming situation for the breastfeeding parent.

The Ontario Public Pools Regulation (565/90) contains wording about food and drink on deck, but does not mention breastfeeding specifically: “With the exception of water, food and drink are not allowed in the pool or on the deck.” Deck being defined as the area 1.87 metres (6 feet) from the pool edge.

The Regulation does permit for food and drink in the general area as designated by the pool operator and owner. In many instances breastfeeding parents have been directed to breastfeed in the general area or in a change room facility, or to cover the child while breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding on the pool deck, with the parent sitting on the edge of the pool, or standing/sitting in the water does not contravene the Ontario Public Pools Regulation.

The most common concerns appear to be:

- The safety of the child
- The safety of other swimmers
- Breast/nipple exposure by the breastfeeding parent

There has been substantial research and attention to breastfeeding in and around the water over the past decade. There are trends and misinformation with regards to the concerns raised by those who manage recreational and/or aquatic facilities.

In regard to the safety of the child:

- The face of the child is usually not near the water at the time of feeding.
- If the face of the child did happen to be close to the water, the seal of lips on the breast makes it unlikely that water would enter mouth.
- Water could enter through nose and if that occurred the child would react in a negative manner; the breastfeeding parent would adjust positioning and breastfeeding could continue.
- According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), the concern about risk of contact with a Recreational Water Illness is very low and not every ingestion will result in illness; that said, aquatic facilities need to have procedures in place to minimize.
- The benefits of breast milk include secretory antibodies and dozens of other anti-bacterial, anti-viral, and anti-parasitic substances.
- Breast milk contains factors that inactivate protozoans such as cryptosporidium and giardia as well as shigella and E.coli.

In regard to the safety of other swimmers:

- Breast milk is an organic matter.
- A small amount of breast milk may enter the water but would not be enough to cause any significant level of deactivation of chlorine.
- CDC does not consider breast milk as a bodily fluid of concern.
- The likelihood of a baby having a bowel movement in the water is not very high after two months of age.
- Spitting up is more common in formula fed babies.
- Any “spit up” is considered to be a “clean” substance and, unlike stool, is not colonized with E.coli. Pools follow their Pool Fouling Procedure.

In regard to breast/nipple exposure by the breastfeeding parent:

- Breastfeeding is a natural process.
- Breastfeeding is supported by Health Canada as the normal and unequalled method of feeding infants.
- It should not be considered to be strange or unusual, and it is certainly not unsafe.
- The word “discreet” should *not* be included in the policy and/or staff training – asking a breastfeeding parent to cover up or go into a change room is unwelcoming and unnecessary.

## Implementation

The Lifesaving Society recommends that every aquatic facility implements a policy of “Breastfeeding Friendly – Anytime, Anywhere.” The Lifesaving Society recommends operators include this position in their facility policy and procedures manual, and staff handbooks.

All staff should review this position and its application at least once a year during staff training sessions, or better, update and refresher sessions should be scheduled regularly throughout the year. A training record should be maintained listing aquatic staff who have participated in the training.

## References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Vomit and Contamination of Pool Water” [www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming)
- Health Canada “Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants” [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)
- Breastfeeding in Aquatic Facilities Position Statement, Lifesaving Society National Standards Commission, June 2022
- Strange, Barb “Breastfeeding at Municipal Pools in Canada,” August 2002.

## Disclaimer

Lifesaving Society Safety Standards are developed using Coroners' recommendations, the latest evidence-based research, and reflect the aquatics industry's best practices at the time the publication was approved.

The purpose of these standards is to encourage swimming pool, waterpark and waterfront owners, managers, operators and regulators to adopt these standards, in order to prevent drownings in aquatic environments.

Lifesaving Society Safety Standards do not replace or supersede local, provincial/ territorial legislation or regulations, but they are considered the standard to which aquatic facility operators should work towards, in order to enhance safety within their operations and to prevent drowning.

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