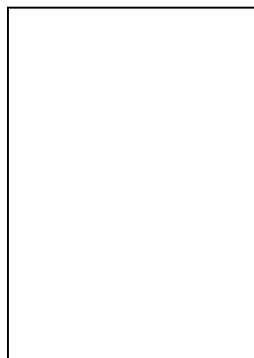


# **Guidelines** for

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## Sports and Activities Risk Management







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## 1 SPORTS

### 1.1 Introduction

The nature of sport and other physical activities, whether informal and recreational or high level competitive, is such that principals and teachers must ensure that precautions and safety measures are undertaken to meet the duty of care appropriate to the particular activity. School policies and procedures should be designed to minimise any potential risk to students, though in many sports, participants voluntarily put themselves in situations where pain and suffering are the likely outcomes. These voluntary assumptions of risk must be assumed within carefully controlled, managed and organised activities. The normal consequences of physical activity may not be able to be avoided - the goal is to remove as much of the abnormal or avoidable risk as possible.

### 1.2 Key Requirements

The key requirements that the school must meet in the safe provision of sport and activities will depend on the particular sport or activity. Government departments for sport and recreation will be able to provide any approved codes of practice or guidelines.

For all sports and activities, the overriding requirement is that the school, and especially staff who are conducting a particular activity, meet the required duty of care to participants in the activity and anyone else who may be affected by the activity.

#### 1.3 Duty of care

The expected duty of care will vary according to the activity and the participants. A higher duty of care is required for:

- more demanding activities
- younger participants
- participants with special needs
- less experienced participants.

The duty of care is breached if appropriate steps to prevent foreseeable risks of injury are not taken. The duty of care is also breached if an injury occurs, or there is a risk of an injury occurring, because of carelessness or negligence. The test as to whether the measures taken are appropriate to meet the duty of care is that of a "reasonable professional", that is, whether a reasonable professional would do the same thing in the same circumstances.

For activities which require higher standards of care, the test is best understood by considering what would be seen as reasonable by similar professionals. In other words, would other physical education teachers view what happened as being reasonably foreseeable or not? It is important that the appropriate "professional" supervises the activity. For example, while a classroom teacher may be suitable to supervise a small group of children playing a simple ball game, more complex sporting activities (eg rugby, hockey, swimming, canoeing etc) will need to be supervised by a suitably qualified person such as a coach or physical education teacher. More adventurous sports may need professional supervision by qualified practitioners. Selecting the appropriate person, who can make a decision as a "reasonable professional", to conduct and supervise a sporting activity is one way the school can meet its duty of care.

In determining the appropriate standard, the following factors will be considered:

- the level of risk involved in the activity
- the precautions which could be taken to avoid injury
- the justifiability of the action
- the usual or professional standards which apply for the activity.



## 2 Managing Sport & Activities

Risk management principles should be applied to all sporting and physical activities. As the risks for each sport or activity will be different on each occasion, specific guidelines are not provided here. However, some general principles for risk control applying to all sport and physical activities are provided.

### 2.1 Organisers and supervisors

Staff involved in organising physical and sporting activities must be appropriately qualified and/or trained. A school must be able to establish the credentials of those staff who are involved in training, managing and supervising sports activities. These staff should also stay up-to-date with current and best practice in their field of expertise and show evidence of appropriate ongoing skill development in coaching and training.

Unqualified and inexperienced staff should not be placed in situations for which they have inappropriate skills. Use of students to coach and supervise should also be treated carefully, with training programs being made available to prepare students for support roles.

There should be policies in place which detail coaching, training and supervising roles of the school staff. Guidelines and instructions are to be communicated to both staff and students and they should be followed carefully. The higher the risk, the less freedom and flexibility should be granted to individual supervisors and trainers in managing their activities.

### 2.2 Participants

Only those people judged fit to undertake an activity should be allowed to participate in it. This does not mean participants must be in peak physical condition - part of the reason for undertaking the activity may be to develop physical fitness. Judging a person's suitability for an activity means taking into account factors such as age, pre-existing medical conditions and disabilities.

Some activities will need to be varied according to the differing abilities of the participants. For example, some classes (eg swimming) may need to be divided into experienced, intermediate and beginner levels.

### 2.3 Pre-existing medical conditions or disabilities

General school administration records should contain information about which students have pre-existing medical conditions and disabilities which may pose difficulties for those students when participating in a physical activity. These records should not be relied on as the sole source of information for staff involved in assessing student suitability for physical education activity. Staff should make general inquiries about an individual's capacity to undertake a new task, game or activity, either formally or informally.

The fact that a student has a pre-existing medical or physical condition does not necessarily bar that student from any particular activity. What is important is that the activity be offered to the student at a level appropriate to the individual's capacity. This includes providing each student with a challenge to improve individual performance. It is advisable to seek parental advice and permission as to the inclusion of students with chronic illness or disability in physical education and sporting programs.

Staff should make sure that appropriate medication is available for students with conditions such as asthma, which may be aggravated by physical exertion, and that they know the correct procedures if a medical emergency arises.

### 2.4 Supervision

Participants should be supervised at all times, regardless of their age, experience level or physical capability. Of course, some participants will require more supervision than others. For some activities, more than one supervisor may be required, however one person should be designated as having overall responsibility for the activity.

## 2.5 Spectators

Precautions must be taken to minimise the risk of harm to spectators and the general public arising from the conduct of school sports and physical activities. Participants in the activity also need to be protected from any harm which a spectator's interference, whether inadvertent or deliberate, may cause. The nature of the steps required will depend on the activity but some examples include:

- physical barriers between spectators and sporting activities (eg roping off the cricket pitch or the running track, or nets behind the softball diamond and around the tennis courts)
- warning signs (eg "Do not enter courts while games are in progress")
- verbal warnings (eg telling spectators not to stand behind goal nets)
- supervision (posting staff as "guards" near particularly hazardous areas).

Control of spectators, particularly around potentially hazardous activities involving running and throwing events, is an important component of the preparation and planning of these events. Students and staff need to know what is expected of them when watching such activities.

## 2.6 Equipment

Most activities will also require the use of specialised equipment or grounds. Equipment (eg bats, balls, ovals) must be well maintained, of appropriate standard or quality and effectively stored. Students should receive instruction and training in the use of items of equipment, even the most familiar kinds. Routines for collecting and returning equipment need to be developed, explained and practised. Penalties for misuse of the equipment by students also need to be established and implemented, preferably after negotiation with students.

## 2.7 Personal protective equipment

Sporting activities usually require participants, including supervisors, to use some form of personal protective equipment, eg boots, leg/shin/ankle/mouth guards, shoulder padding, eye goggles, ear plugs, gloves, helmets etc. Personal protective equipment, including clothing and footwear, must be appropriate for the particular activity. Students should be informed as to what is appropriate and be aware of the consequences if they do not have correct equipment (eg exclusion from the activity). The school may supply some equipment (eg cricket helmets) or it may require students to supply their own (eg mouthguards and footwear). Supervisors, whether teachers, coaches or instructors, must wear and use the right equipment not only for their own personal safety but also as role models for students, who will expect them to set the standard.

## 2.8 First aid

All staff supervising sport and physical activity should hold a basic first aid qualification. They should also be familiar with the types of injuries likely to occur for any particular activity. For some activities, particularly competitive sports which are on fields not immediately adjacent to school buildings, it may be appropriate for first aid equipment to be kept on site (eg ice packs and stretchers).

## 2.9 Water safety

Administrative instructions and guidelines issued by the relevant educational authority will usually determine the staff requirements for the supervision of swimming and water safety programs. For example, staff requirements may vary according to the nature of swimming venues, such as:

- confined shallow water venues with water to a maximum depth of shoulder height
- open deep water venues which include deep and/or flowing water at non-surf beaches, lakes, channels, rivers and dams
- surf beaches with direct access to ocean waters.

In all cases, the staff requirements set out in the administrative instructions and guidelines must be rigorously observed. If there is uncertainty as to staffing requirements, then further advice should be sought from the relevant educational authority.

An employed staff member must be given overall responsibility for any water-based activity, while other adults approved by the principal may participate. It is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that all staff are capable of undertaking the duties assigned to them. Staff must have the necessary certificates of competence both to teach swimming and water safety, and to activate emergency rescue, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and first aid procedures competently.

The staff member in direct control of the swimming group is legally responsible for the implementation of emergency procedures, including contacting a doctor, ambulance or other emergency service. This person is also responsible for ensuring that all the teachers assisting at the venue carry out the tasks relating to the supervision of all students at the venue.

### 3 Out of school activities

#### 3.1 Supervision

Activities taking place outside of school grounds require the permission of the principal and other appropriate designated authorities. Students are in the care of staff while they are on any school approved excursion and activity. They are required to abide by school rules and regulations while out of the school premises. The ratio of staff to students on inter-school sports will vary depending on factors such as age, grade, activity and previous practice. Some schools make use of prefects/seniors to assist in marshalling students on out of school events. It must be reinforced that the staff member remains ultimately in control of students even if they are being organised by seniors. The same principle applies if parents are involved. The school's duty is not necessarily abrogated by the presence of parents at excursions and sporting events.

#### 3.2 Equipment and facilities

Facilities and equipment not supplied by the school need to be checked for appropriateness and safety, to the same standard that the school would provide. Staff should not allow students to participate in a physical activity if they are not satisfied that the grounds and equipment are reasonably safe. The availability of first aid treatment at the site also needs to be checked. If it is not supplied by the external site or activity organiser, the school needs to ensure that a qualified first aider is present throughout the activity.

### Sample Documents

The following sample documents are provided:

- 1 School Policy on Sport and Activities
- 2 School Sport and Activity Checklist
- 3 Staff Sport and Activity Checklist

The policy is for general application. A school may also wish to develop specific policies for particular sports and activities.

The school checklist should be used by the principal to check safety precautions are in place for all sports and activities in the school. The staff checklist should be used by staff members before commencing each activity. This could also be tailored for specific activities. If an answer to any of the questions on either checklist is "No", the school is taking a higher risk if it proceeds with the activity.

There is a significantly greater risk of harm to the health and safety of students and staff when a school provides the opportunity for involvement in adventure sports such as canoeing, abseiling, mountain climbing etc, than there is for regular school-based sporting activities. The higher risks, which are due to the more adventurous nature of the activity, are actually one of the sources of enjoyment of the activity for many people. Schools should not refuse to offer adventure sports on the grounds of risk; rather, they need to put in place measures to manage the risks adequately and to make sure participants are not unnecessarily exposed to risks.



## School Sport and Activity Policy

### School commitment

[Insert school name] is committed to the provision of quality sport and activity experiences in a safe environment without compromising the curriculum designed for those activities.

### Management priorities

This school will ensure that:

- staff involved in the sporting program are aware of specific regulations/ guidelines/prohibitions relating to particular activities
- students involved are informed of regulations which affect them
- sporting activities are managed with care and attention to the safety of all participants
- staff who manage or coach students in sporting activities receive appropriate training in skills and techniques
- students who participate in sporting activities will be appropriately prepared for their level of involvement
- students who help manage and train other students will do so under the supervision of staff
- fields are prepared, maintained and used with safety of participants in mind
- equipment is appropriately stored, maintained in good condition and used safely
- there are clear procedures for borrowing and returning equipment
- nominated persons are responsible for preparing regulations relating to sporting activities and events
- students and staff are informed of the regulations affecting sporting activities and events, including behaviour as spectators
- first aid equipment is regularly maintained and available at sporting events
- emergency procedures are in place for when an emergency occurs during a sporting activity.

### Supervisor commitment

Supervisors of sports and physical activities will ensure that:

- risk management principles have been applied to the activity
- all participants have been assessed to participate in the activity at an appropriate level
- all participants are wearing appropriate personal protective equipment
- all participants are wearing appropriate clothing and footwear
- they know which participants have pre-existing medical conditions or disabilities, and can attend to the special needs of these participants
- where required, the principal's approval for the activity has been obtained
- where required, parental permission for a student's participation has been granted
- equipment and grounds have been inspected, are in good condition and are safe to use
- professional advice has been obtained, where necessary
- appropriate first aid equipment is provided and participants are aware of emergency procedures.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal)





## School Sport and Activity Checklist

School Sport and Activity Checklist		
All questions are to be answered	Yes	No
Are staff aware of any specific regulations or guidelines concerning sporting activities which take place in the school or under the school's authority?		
Are students informed of general regulations which affect them?		
Are students informed of the rules pertaining to each activity offered, before undertaking that activity?		
Are all sporting coaches qualified to coach their teams/students?		
Are referees, managers, marshals trained to carry out their roles?		
Are sports grounds and facilities regularly inspected and maintained? The following grounds and facilities are included in the maintenance routine: • sporting fields/ovals • gymnasium • pool • tennis/squash court • playground.		
Is sporting equipment regularly inspected for damage and wear?		
Is equipment stored and maintained effectively?		
Are provisions made for first aid at all sporting and physical activities?		
Is relevant medical information made available to appropriate supervisors?		
Are staff, students and parents aware of the school's policy of non-participation without appropriate protective equipment?		
Am I aware of any regulations or guidelines concerning this activity?		
Have I checked that the students are aware of these regulations?		
Have I checked that the students are aware of the particular rules for this activity, before we begin?		
Have I inspected the grounds/facilities?		
Have I checked that the equipment provided by the school is in good condition and safe to use?		
Are all participants wearing the appropriate personal equipment?		
Is equipment cleaned and stored properly after use?		
Do I know which participants have a pre-existing medical condition or disability?		
Have I assessed each participant's suitability for the level of activity?		
Do I need the principal's or parents' permission for this activity?		
Have I taken appropriate steps to ensure spectators are not at risk from the activity, nor able to put participants at risk?		
Is appropriate first aid equipment at hand during the activity?		
Is professional advice or assistance required for this activity?		