Non-Lifeguarded Swimming Pools Guidance
ING02

# Guidance for Managing Safety in Non-lifeguarded Swimming Pools

Providing safe access, use, and enjoyment of non-lifeguarded swimming pools in the UK

CIMSPA

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## ABSTRACT

*This guidance is published by the CIMSPA, Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), Swim England and ukactive to support swimming pool operators in safely managing non-lifeguarded swimming pools.*

It is intended for UK-based employers, sole traders, and facility owners (collectively 'pool operators') but may be helpful to those outside the UK.

The document is designed to supplement the guidance already available:

- HSE publication, 'Health and safety in swimming pools' ('HSG179'), available at https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg179.htm.

- British Standard publication BS EN 15288-2, available at https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/.

The guidance has been developed in response to a growing number of non-lifeguarded pools and the growing adoption of swimming pool technology. Tragically, there have been fatalities and prosecutions related to non-lifeguarded swimming pools where risk control measures are found to be inadequate, which have reinforced the need for this guidance.

There are estimated to be over 1,200 non-lifeguarded swimming pools in the UK, approximately 33% of the non-domestic pool estate. These include pools such as some indoor and outdoor pools, hotels, health clubs, gyms, spas, holiday resorts, corporate private leisure facilities, youth clubs, and communal pools within high-density residential buildings. Some facilities run both lifeguarded and non-lifeguarded sessions as part of their activity timetable.

Without provision to offer non-lifeguarded pools, there would be widespread closures of pool facilities in the UK. Many non-lifeguarded pools provide vital access to swimming and lifesaving instruction under the supervision of an instructor with appropriate additional supervision skills training. Non-lifeguarded pools are essential to ensuring the next generation is suitably equipped to enjoy water safely.

This document provides clear guidance on the controls available to help pool operators ensure they implement reasonably practicable controls in non-lifeguarded swimming pools.

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First Edition published June 2025.

## 1. APPLICABILITY

**1.1** This guidance applies to pool operators who have determined that providing lifeguard supervision is not reasonably practicable. It includes facilities such as some indoor and outdoor pools, hotels, health clubs, gyms, spas, holiday resorts, corporate private leisure facilities, youth clubs, and communal pools within high-density residential buildings.[2]

**1.2** The guidance primarily focuses on assisting pool operators in meeting their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 ('1974 Act') and the associated regulations.

**1.3** Operators must assess the risk to those working in and/or using the swimming pool and determine the measures it is reasonably practicable to provide to protect the health and safety of pool users, employees, self-employed persons, contractors, and those using the facility as their place of work. A competent person should complete the risk assessment.

**1.4** Industry guidance, such as HSG179 and EN15288, provides a non-exhaustive list of considerations that operators should consider when deciding whether it is reasonably practicable to provide lifeguard supervision. To avoid inconsistencies, these considerations are not repeated in this guidance.

**1.5** This guidance does not apply to:

(a) Segregated areas of inland or coastal water used for swimming or other aquatic activities.

(b) Domestic swimming, bathing, or paddling pools restricting access to a small number of residents and their guests.

**1.6** Where an operator determines, through the risk assessment process, that lifeguard supervision is not reasonably practicable, this document provides guidance to help pool operators implement reasonably practicable measures.

[2] High-density residential buildings or neighbourhoods are typically found in large cities in the UK. The number of these facilities with communal swimming pools, shared by large numbers of people, sometimes several hundred residents, is increasing. The UK pool estate was traditionally divided into domestic and non-domestic (commercial) use. Pool industry guidance has typically focussed on the non-domestic market, but high-density residential buildings challenge the basis of this distinction, which considers domestic pools to have low usage and, therefore, low risk. Some high-density residential buildings have communal workspaces and actively market towards attracting small businesses and solo entrepreneurs. This may result in some freeholders owing duties under the 1974 Act.

## 2. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

### 2.1 People Terms

**2.1.1 Lifeguard:** A trained person with a recognised qualification, responsible for providing supervision and early intervention to help prevent accidents, rescue and recover persons to the poolside, and provide CPR and first aid.

**2.1.2 Emergency Responder/Rescuer:** A person responsible for, qualified and competent in, responding to the pool alarm and/or calls for assistance, rescuing and recovering a person to the poolside, and providing CPR and first aid.

### 2.2 Supervision Terms

**2.2.1 Non-lifeguarded pool:** A pool where the operator, through the risk assessment process, can demonstrate it is not necessary to provide lifeguard supervision and, therefore, it is not provided.

**2.2.2 Lifeguard supervision:** Supervision by a lifeguard(s) located around the poolside and whose primary role is providing pool supervision and early intervention to prevent accidents.[3]

**2.2.3 Periodic checks:** Checks at regular intervals performed by one or more competent persons, either remotely or physically, from the poolside, by those who have various duties within their role, including the performance of periodic checks.

### 2.3 Technological Terms

**2.3.1 Alert alarm:** An audible, visual, or tactile signal designed to attract the attention of others.

**2.3.2 Automated monitoring and detection system:** A type of swimming pool technology designed to constantly monitor pool users and trigger an alert if a person who may be in danger is detected.

**2.3.4 Wearable system:** A type of technology system that combines a device that each pool user must wear whilst using the pool with artificial intelligence to analyse biometric, geospatial, and/or environmental data to trigger alerts when a person who may be in danger is detected.[4]

**2.3.5 CCTV system:** A network of overhead and/or underwater cameras, with or without infrared imagining capability, linked to visual displays and providing a continuous feed of real-time images that staff can view easily.

[3] Some industry guidance documents use the term 'constant poolside supervision.' We prefer the term 'lifeguard supervision' as supervision is not constant; it is interspersed by gaps as the lifeguard scans and interacts with those in the pool environment. HSG179 defines a lifeguard by their competencies, not by reference to holding a lifeguard qualification, so we use the term 'lifeguard supervision' throughout this document.

[4] Although no definition of an automated detection and monitoring system is provided in ING01 Guidance for Automated Monitoring and Detection Systems, its features are described. ING01 does not contain guidance on 'wearable systems', so the term 'computer vision system' is used to distinguish an AI-enhanced camera-based system from a 'wearable system' and a 'CCTV system'. The definition of 'computer vision system' is consistent with that provided in ISO 20380:2017 Computer vision systems for the detection of drowning accidents in swimming pools, available at https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/.

First Edition published June 2025.

## 3. OVERVIEW

**3.1** Operators must provide lifeguard supervision unless they can show it is not reasonably practicable to do so. The factors to consider when determining whether it is reasonably practicable to provide lifeguard supervision are already set out in industry guidance, including in HSG179 Health and safety in swimming pools - HSE and BS EN 15288-2, available at https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/.

**3.2** The HSE provides further guidance to assist operators in deciding if a measure is reasonably practicable in its enforcement guidance, which can be found at https://www.hse.gov.uk/enforce/expert/index.htm. The operator should generally have regard to the following:

(a) Whether the measure will avert or reduce the risk.

(b) Whether providing such a measure would be grossly disproportionate to the risk posed.

(c) A comparison of the sacrifice of taking measures to avert or reduce the risk and the magnitude of the risk to one or more persons' health and safety.

**3.3** Operators are reminded of their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc 1974 Act. If it is possible to implement a measure that would reduce the risk to persons' health and safety, then it should be provided unless the operator can show why it is not reasonably practicable to do so.

**3.4** When a suitable and sufficient risk assessment determines that lifeguard supervision is not required, alternative controls must be implemented if they are reasonably practicable. See HSG179 paragraph 112 - Precautions where constant poolside supervision is not provided. Operators of non-lifeguarded pools have a range of control measures available to them that will make the pool safer. This document has broadly divided these into 'design' and 'operational' controls, and further guidance under those headings is provided below.

# 4. DESIGN CONTROLS

## 4.1 General

**4.1.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider how they can design and modify the pool and its features to mitigate the risks to health and safety. Operators may find it helpful to consider implementing one or more of the following design controls.

## 4.2 Physical Features

**4.2.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider physically modifying the pool to remove higher-risk features.

**4.2.2** Where reasonably practicable, the pool water depth should not exceed 1.35 metres throughout.[5] Where the water depth exceeds 1.35 metres, this is likely to increase the risk to pool users' health and safety. Where it is not reasonably practicable to lessen the water depth, additional risk mitigation may be required, such as changing admission criteria, more frequent checks or introducing an automated monitoring and detection system.

**4.2.3** Steep gradients should be avoided. EN 15288 specifies that gradients in water depths below 0.8m should be achieved through gradients of 1 in 20; between 0.8m and 1.35m, gradients should be no steeper than 1 in 17.

**4.2.4** Any pool design or features that negatively impacts visibility should also be avoided. Waterslides, wave machines and other high-excitement activities should be avoided in non-lifeguarded pools.

**4.2.5** Where any of the features in 4.2.3 – 4.2.4 are present, and it is not reasonably practicable to remove them, additional risk mitigation may be required; such as the provision of underwater and/or overhead CCTV cameras to provide a clear view, automated monitoring and detection system and more frequent checks.

**4.2.6** Operators should consider what additional safety measures should be implemented to ensure that swimmers are aware of the risks and can act appropriately in an emergency where a lifeguard is not present.

## 4.3 CCTV System

**4.3.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider implementing a CCTV system to help one or more responsible persons perform periodic checks remotely. Remote checks can increase the frequency at which checks can be undertaken, and in cases where underwater cameras are provided, improve the responsible person's view of the pool bottom.

**4.3.2** Overhead and/or underwater cameras, with or without infrared capability, should be considered. The number of cameras required will vary according to the pool dimensions and visible conditions. The number of cameras must be sufficient to ensure one or more responsible persons have a clear view of the pool when performing periodic checks remotely.

**4.3.3** The size of the monitor and quality of CCTV images should be sufficient to enable responsible persons to carry out the necessary checks effectively, clearly complete the checks, and identify a pool user in danger.

**4.3.4** Operators should consider the frequency at which responsible persons should review the CCTV images, balancing the risk to persons using the pool with the demands of other duties they are expected to perform. See section 5.4, Periodic Checks, for more information and guidance.

[5] BS EN 15288-1 defines 'non-swimmer areas' as lower-risk areas where the water depth is below 1.35 metres.

First Edition published June 2025.

**4.3.5** Responsible persons should receive the necessary information and/or training to ensure those surveying the CCTV images can identify a person potentially in danger and are able to summon assistance.

**4.3.6** Staff completing checks should receive appropriate oversight from the management team to ensure they are completed effectively.

**4.3.7** Where CCTV is provided, tests should be completed to check that the whole pool is visible on the CCTV monitor(s).

### 4.4 Automated Monitoring and Detection System

**4.4.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider implementing an Automated Monitoring and Detection system to increase the speed by which persons in danger are detected and provide an additional layer of protection.

**4.4.2** Consideration should be given to the guidance available in the industry guidance publication, 'ING01 Guidance for Automated Monitoring and Detection Systems' available at https://www.rlss.org.uk /other-guidance. The reliability of the system should be considered when evaluating the overall effect on the risk to health and safety.

**4.4.3** The features and limitations of the Automated Monitoring and Detection system should be considered. Some systems can only detect a person in danger when they remain stationary for prolonged periods or only when they are fully submerged or when submerged under a certain depth. Systems vary in what information they extract from the images analysed, how that information is processed, the conditions which must be met and the length of time required before an alert is triggered.

**4.4.4** System properties of an Automated Monitoring and Detection system may or may not be static, as some systems are linked to a cloud database of images from multiple pools across several locations and have machine learning capability designed to improve their detection performance over time. Operators should maintain oversight of system changes, report errors or deviations, and consider any guidance from the system manufacturer.

### 4.5 Wearable System

**4.5.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider implementing a monitoring and detection system using wearable devices. Devices come in a range of designs, including bracelets, pendants, and headbands.

**4.5.2** Consideration should be given to the benefits and reliability of any wearable system used. When assessing its overall effect on the risk to health and safety, pool user behaviour should be taken into account. Common user deviations include forgetting to wear or intentionally removing the device while using the pool.

**4.5.3** Operators should carefully select wearable devices for comfort and fit to ensure they are suitable for the activities pool users are likely to undertake. Devices that trigger an alert when they become separated from the customer for an extended period may alert operators to non-compliance with the terms of use. Wearable systems may be more effective during adult-only sessions rather than those that permit young children.

**4.5.4** Operators will need to understand and manage any limitations of the wearable system.

### 4.6 Alarm System

**4.6.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should install means of summoning assistance, such as alarm points.

**4.6.2** Alarm points should be accompanied by clear signage to help pool users identify them and use them in the event of an emergency.

**4.6.3** Alarms should sound in areas where staff are present and able to hear and respond to the alarm. Pagers or other technology that staff wear could be considered to ensure they are aware that the alarm has been pressed.

**4.6.4** The number and location of fixed alarm points should be considered to ensure they are visible and can be easily accessed by customers. A variety of alarm signals are available, including auditory, visual, and wearable tactile indicators. Personal alarm systems, often worn as pendants, can also be considered and may be more appropriate where solo use is permitted.

**4.6.5** Whatever means of summoning assistance are provided, operators should ensure that it is effective in promptly summoning emergency responders/rescuers to the poolside.

### 4.7 Poolside Phone

**4.7.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider installing a poolside phone that can be used to summon assistance. The phone's location should be considered to ensure it is visible and can be easily accessed by customers.

**4.7.2** Phones should sound in areas where staff are present and can answer the phone and respond. If mobile phones are used it is important that they always have coverage in all areas.

### 4.8 Physical Access Restrictions

**4.8.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider installing physical access restrictions to prevent unauthorised access to the pool, such as lockable gates, barriers, high-handled doors, turnstiles, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) devices, fingerprint readers, and/or facial recognition technology.

**4.8.2** Consideration should be given to how users may seek to circumvent physical access restrictions and what can be done to mitigate this. Operators should revisit their control measures to ensure their continued adequacy where evidence of circumvention becomes apparent.

### 4.9 Rescue Equipment

**4.9.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should ensure rescue equipment is available around the pool to be used in the event of an emergency.

**4.9.2** The location of the equipment should be carefully considered to ensure it is accessible to staff and pool users; in addition, equipment should be available to staff when they enter the pool area in the event of an emergency.

**4.9.3** Rescue equipment should be easily visible and identifiable to staff and those using the swimming pool.

**4.9.4** Equipment should be suitable for the environment, maintained and checked to ensure it remains fit for purpose and in the correct location.

**4.9.5** Operators should carefully consider the equipment provided and the ability of a bystander to use it in the event of a pool user needing assistance. Torpedo buoys and reach poles are suitable options.

First Edition published June 2025.

# 5. OPERATIONAL CONTROLS

## 5.1 General

**5.1.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider operational controls to mitigate the risks to health and safety. Operators may find it helpful to implement the following controls.

## 5.2 Admissions Policy

**5.2.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should consider producing an admissions policy that states the terms of use, including who can use the pool.

**5.2.2** When creating an admission policy, a risk assessment process should be used and the following considered (the list is not intended to be exhaustive):

- Admission of under 8s, who should be supervised by a responsible person when they are permitted entry.[6]
- Admission of children over the age of 8
- Non-swimmers
- Vulnerable adults
- Those with medical conditions that could lead to impaired consciousness
- Those with disabilities
- Demographics and ability of users, if known

**5.2.3** Hypoxic training, prolonged breath-holding, and diving should be prohibited. Pool users should be dissuaded from playing boisterous games which may result in one pool user holding another under the water.[7]

**5.2.4** Two or more people should typically use the pool at any time. Where solo use is permitted, additional controls may be required, such as more regular remote/poolside checks and an automated monitoring and detection system.[8]

**5.2.5** Operators should consider how to restrict access to pool users under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

**5.2.6** Operators may consider implementing a flexible supervision policy that provides more controls at some times, such as when children are permitted to use the pool, and less at others, such as during low-usage periods or adult-only sessions. Where a flexible approach is adopted, operators should revisit Section 3 of this document to ensure they adopt a reasonably practicable approach during all non-lifeguarded sessions.

[6] Further guidance on admission policies and parent-to-child ratios is available in the CIMSPA publication, Swimming Pool Admission and Access (2023, version 2), available at https://www.cimspa.co.uk/news-blog/news/2023/new-guidance-notes/.

[7] Further guidance on hypoxic training and prolonged breath-holding is available in the RLSS UK publication, GS005 Shallow Water Blackout, Hyperventilation, and Breath-Holding, and GS012 Swimming Pool Activities involving Extended Breath-Holding, available at https://www.rlss.org.uk/rlss-uk-industry-guidance.

[8] Some industry guidance uses the term 'lone swimmer.' We prefer the term 'solo use,' as swimmers and non-swimmers use non-lifeguarded pools.

### 5.3 Customer Information and Signage

**5.3.1** Operators relying on remote monitoring should ensure customers are aware that the pool is not lifeguarded and know how and where to summon assistance.

**5.3.2** Display safety information, including water depth, no diving, pool rules and safe use.

**5.3.3** Pool users should have every opportunity to read and understand safety information.

**5.3.4** Safety information for customers should be reinforced at multiple points, such as, the entrance, changing rooms and pool area. It should not be possible to access the poolside without having had the opportunity to view and consider the relevant safety information.

**5.3.5** Signage should use recognised colours, symbols and iconography, and information should be accessible to those with English as a second language. There is guidance available to help ensure signage is appropriate. For more information on the guidance available, see the HSE's website at https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l64.htm or BS EN ISO 7010 https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/.

**5.3.6** Safety messages are more effective when reinforced by oral reminders from employees. Periodic prompts, such as by email or text, can further encourage a higher level of compliance with the terms of use and increased familiarisation with how to identify danger and summon assistance.

First Edition published June 2025.

## 5.4 Periodic Checks

**5.4.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded swimming pools should implement a system of periodic checks of the pool by a competent person.

**5.4.2** Checks may be performed remotely or from the poolside.

**5.4.3** Operators should ensure that employees completing checks can clearly see the entirety of the area they are required to check.

**5.4.4** Operators should consider the frequency at which checks are performed, balancing the risk to pool users with the other duties the responsible person(s) must perform.[9] Consideration should be given to whether checks could be performed more frequently and/or more reliably if they were conducted remotely, as this may have a greater effect on reducing risk.

**5.4.5** Those responsible for performing the checks need to be provided with the relevant information and/or training to ensure they can perform them competently. The information and/or training should include how to identify a person who may be in danger and how to summon assistance.

**5.4.6** Non-lifeguarded pool operators should detail how staff should complete remote and physical checks; detail may include the following, which is not intended to be exhaustive:

- Count the number of pool users.
- Check if all pool users are safe and not in any distress or difficulty.
- Check if any children are present.
- Check if there are lone bathers.
- Check if there are any significant hazards.
- Check if there is any unusual behaviour.
- Check if any pool users are breaking any pool rules.

**5.4.7** The management team should appropriately oversee these checks to ensure they are completed effectively. Operators may find it helpful to keep a record of the checks performed and any key findings to enable analysis of that information, identify trends, and identify continual improvement opportunities.

**5.4.8** Those responsible for performing check should understand the pool rules and be able to deal with anyone who does not follow them and puts themselves and others at risk of harm.

[9] Operators across the UK and Ireland operate physical and/or remote checks at a range of frequencies, from every 5 minutes to every 30 minutes. The frequency of checks is a matter for the operator to determine in accordance with their risk assessment. Although coroners in England and Wales cannot make specific recommendations for the frequency of checks, they have commented on such checks (for example, https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Bell-2016-0119.pdf). Requiring checks at intervals of every 15 minutes can act as an appropriate starting point before making any adjustments required by your risk assessment.

## 5.5 Emergency Responders/Rescuers

**5.5.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools must provide one or more Emergency Responders/Rescuers available within the facility to respond to requests for assistance, rescue persons safely from the pool, and provide CPR and first aid. The number of Emergency Responders/Rescuers required would be based on the site-specific risk assessment.

**5.5.2** Emergency Responders/Rescuers may undertake other responsibilities when they are not required, but these must not prevent them from responding promptly and attending the poolside when needed.

**5.5.3** An Emergency Responder/Rescuer may also be responsible for observing CCTV images, but these are distinct roles, and they must also meet the guidance herein for responsible persons.

**5.5.4** Operators should consider what information and/or training an Emergency Responder/Rescuer requires to demonstrate and maintain their competency and ensure this is provided. An Emergency Responder/Rescuer should be competent in rescuing and recovering one or more persons from the pool and providing CPR and first aid.

**5.5.5** The operator should determine the frequency at which information, and/or training and competency assessment are provided. This frequency should be appropriate for revisiting core knowledge areas and practising key skills associated with the Emergency Responder/Rescuer role.

**5.5.6** Emergency Responders/Rescuers must be able to respond immediately to deal with any emergency in the swimming pool. Consideration should be given to the time they will take to reach the swimming pool.

## 5.6 Ongoing Assurance

**5.6.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should provide ongoing assurance to ensure the controls implemented remain effective.

**5.6.2** Ongoing assurance may include a variety of activities, such as management walkthroughs, desktop exercises, periodic inspections, internal or third-party audits, and/or practice drills.

**5.6.3** The operator should determine the type and level of assurance it is reasonably practicable to provide.

## 5.7 Failure of Control Measures

**5.7.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools are responsible for implementing control measures, as detailed within the risk assessments, to reduce the risk to pool users. Control measures can fail; for example, a CCTV camera may stop operating, or an alarm system may not sound when tested.

**5.7.2** Operators should consider how control measures may fail and create alternative control measures in these circumstances, which may result in a swimming pool being closed.

**5.7.3** Alternative arrangements should be detailed within the Pool Safety Operating Procedures (PSOPs).

First Edition published June 2025.

## 6. TRAINING

**6.1** Operators of non-lifeguard pools should provide training and competency assessment to staff who will respond to an emergency.

**6.2** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should provide training to staff who will be responsible for remote and physical checks.

**6.3** Remote and physical check training should include:

- What to look for when conducting checks
- How a pool user in need of assistance may present
- How to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency or the need to investigate
- If in doubt, take action and investigate further
- If required, how to record when checks have been completed

**6.4** Staff should be trained and competent in the content of the Pool Safety Operating Procedures in order to operate the pool on a day-to-day basis and perform the necessary role in the event of an emergency.

**6.5** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should determine the frequency of ongoing staff training to ensure they remain competent in their roles.

## 7. DOCUMENTATION

**7.1** Operators of non-lifeguarded pools should document the key safety arrangements and perform periodic reviews to ensure they continue being relevant, accurate, and appropriate.

**7.2** Where the pool operator considered a control measure but found it not reasonably practicable to implement, documenting the reason can help site managers better explain to enforcement officers and other interested parties why it is not in place.

**7.3** The Pool Safety Operating Procedures should detail safety arrangements in place for non-lifeguarded swimming pools. The Emergency Action Plan should consider situations applicable to non-lifeguarded swimming pools. For more information about the content of a PSOP, see https://www.rlss.org.uk/pool-safety-operating-procedures-psop-example-content-list-gs018.

**7.4** Accident, incident and near-miss records should be reviewed and analysed at appropriate intervals to identify trends and contribute to continual improvement.[10] Where improvement opportunities are identified, operators should implement them safely and promptly if it is reasonable to do so.

**7.5** Operators may find it helpful to bring this guidance to the attention of enforcement bodies who query the arrangements for non-lifeguarded pools in place at their facility.

**7.6** Operators may find it helpful to review the findings of any investigations or prosecutions of non-lifeguarded pools in the sector and review their safety arrangements to ensure they remain appropriate.

[10] For more information on accident analysis, see the HSE publication, 'HSG245 Investigating accidents and incidents', available at https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg245.htm.

First Edition published June 2025.

## APPENDIX

Example signage can be found below:





CCTV
in operation
within this area

Shower
before using
the pool

NO
GLASSWARE
within the pool area

Children under X must be supervised in the pool and changing room by a parent or adult (18+). A maximum of 2 children under X is permitted per parent / adult.

First Edition published June 2025.

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