



World Water Safety

INTERNATIONAL LIFE SAVING FEDERATION

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LIFESAVING POSITION STATEMENT - LPS 07

FITNESS TESTING FOR LIFEGUARDS

NOTE: This statement is intended for those lifeguards, acting in a professional or volunteer capacity, who are trained in the techniques of water rescue and resuscitation and who assume a duty to safeguard members of the public at aquatic sites. They may be called lifeguards, lifesavers or both. This statement is not directed at members of the public trained in water safety and rescue techniques, but without a duty to respond, who may also be known, in some areas of the world, as lifesavers.

The standards outlined in this position statement are the minimum that ILS recommends. ILS encourages organisations to exceed these recommended minimum standards where local conditions and/or expectations of lifeguards are warranted.

BACKGROUND

Experts in the field of lifeguard training and rescue believe that lifeguards need to be able to demonstrate a reasonable level of fitness. It is presumed that lifeguards would have sound swimming and water rescue skills. The ability for lifeguards to swim a specified distance within a defined amount of time has been shown to correlate.

The available English language studies in the aquatic setting were reviewed. The data is cohort studies of lifeguard pre-employment assessment outcomes. Level of evidence from the research is low and not directly related to the question addressed in this review. There are no direct outcome data for lifeguards responding to victims. The level of evidence in literature is low and most frequently expert opinion. The swimming data was extrapolated from swimming pool environments. The beach data did not involve swimming.

Lifeguard training manuals from many national lifeguard training programs were reviewed. Many had minimum swimming performance recommendations, based on consensus expert opinion. These recommendations have been in place for many years and in some cases many decades. This history of application of recommendations to the issue at hand is the strongest evidence available.

Tests involving the ability to swim have been shown to have strong evidence to support inclusion in standardised lifeguard fitness testing. Although most open water rescues, involving swimming, are likely to occur within 100m of the shoreline it is important for lifeguards to be able to competently reach the victim and return themselves and the victim to shore. Open water lifeguards will also be exposed to many environmental hazards in the performance of rescues which they will need to be fit enough to endure. However, there is also much evidence to show that location and task specific testing is also an important part of fitness testing for lifeguards.

Research by Tipton et al concluded that pool swim times and other land-based tests do not strongly predict surf swimming performance. Therefore, it is recommended that tests for surf lifeguards be conducted in the surf environment.

Many national lifeguard training organisations have been using similar fitness testing standards for many years. There is a lack of evidence of success and a lack of evidence of risk or injury to victims or rescuers. Retrospective and prospective research is recommended to provide further data on this issue. The recommendations that follow are based on consensus expert opinion of the ILS Rescue Commission.

STATEMENT

The International Life Saving Federation recommends that prospective research is recommended to provide data on this issue.

The minimum standards of fitness testing for lifeguards are recommended as follows, until there is data to confirm, refute or modify these consensus expert opinion recommendations.

1. A swimming test is an appropriate way of demonstrating fitness in a lifeguard.
2. Fitness tests should be conducted with the bare minimum of equipment (i.e. no fins or flotation devices), and can be conducted in any suitable body of water over a measured distance. If the swim test is being conducted in a pool, that pool should be a minimum of 25 meters in length.
3. Training organisations should ensure candidates are safe in the environment in which they will be participating in their lifeguard training. At all times the safety of lifeguards undertaking a fitness test is paramount. Organisations conducting fitness tests for lifeguards should ensure their safety through the provision of adequate water coverage including the use of surveillance and rescue craft where appropriate.
4. Assess the level of swimming ability in a safe environment, prior to training in an open water environment. For clarification, ILS has not recommended a minimum entry (pre-test) assessment. Each organisation undertaking training should have an entry level pre-test based on their particular circumstances. In the absence of a pre-test being undertaken, appropriate risk mitigation strategies need to be put in place.
5. Appropriate skill training in the environment in which the lifeguard will be operating is also recommended including how to enter the water, wading techniques, surf swimming skills, use of rips, etc. Therefore, it is recommended that tests for surf lifeguards be conducted in the surf environment.
6. Assessing fitness through a minimum swim fitness standard:

- a. The ILS recommended minimum swimming requirement for beach and open water lifeguard award is: 400 metres in 8 minutes.
 - b. The ILS recommended minimum swimming requirement for pool lifeguard award is: 400 metres continuous un-timed and a timed test of 50 meters in 50 seconds.
7. Operational requirement:
Organisations should assess operational requirements and where necessary develop additional specific standards to meet that operational requirement. This may include a timed run, lifting (weight) standard, timed utilisation of equipment specific to that operation/location or a combination of the above (i.e. a timed run/swim/run).

LEVEL OF EVIDENCE

This document is based on expert consensus.

POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None of the participants in the consensus process leading to this position statement has a conflict of interest with the stakeholder industry, technology, persons or organisations that are identified and/or impacted by the position statement

REFERENCES

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- (3) USLA National consensus guidelines resulting from the 1980 Galveston Conference.
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- (9) Bierens. J.L.M (ED), Drowning, (pp334-335) *Evidenced-Based Standards in Lifesaving* (Wernicki. P, Espinoi. M) (2014)
- (10) Tipton. M, Wooler. A. The Science of Beach Lifeguarding (pp.221-232) *Occupational fitness and strength standards for beach lifeguarding* (Reilly. T, Tipton. M)

APPROVED

Position Statement approved by ILS on 02/11/2007 and 03/09/2016.