

Survival Guide for Outdoor Swim Meets

Outdoor swim meets are fun, but have unique challenges compared to indoor meets. Advance preparation will keep you and your swimmer comfortable and healthy.

Guidelines for dealing with your swimmer in outdoor meets:

- Monitor drink and food intake. Your swimmer should be sipping fluids constantly. Do not rely on waiting until they are thirsty! By then it is too late and they may already be dehydrated. Persuade your swimmers to keep drinking all through the meet. Encourage fluids before and after the sessions. It will keep your swimmer healthy and allow maximum performance.
- As with every meet, your swimmer should check in with a coach before and after each event
- Prevent sunburn! Keep track of when sunscreen should be reapplied (even when it's cloudy). Wearing a shirt or cover-up is very helpful with sunburn prevention.
- Do not allow too much running around or your swimmer will get tired. Encourage them to cheer for teammates instead or have them rest in the shade.

Basic challenges of outdoor meets:

Hydration: This is the **most important factor** at an outdoor meet. Make sure to have plenty of water or sports drinks for you and your swimmer.

Weather: It could be hot or unseasonably cold. It may rainy and/or windy. Be prepared.

Sun exposure: UV rays will burn your skin. Shaded areas at the meet may be hard to find.

Gear: *Bring the usual swim gear – suits, goggles, caps and towels.* Here is what else to take to the pool (or leave in your vehicle if needed).

- Tinted goggles:
Your swimmer may be more comfortable swimming outdoors in tinted goggles to cut the glare. You can usually get tinted goggles in the same style they are already wearing. Check with the meet vendor if you do not already have a pair.
- Sunscreen:
Apply often! It is painful to swim the second day of a meet with a sunburn. Be firm about reapplying.
- Folding chairs:
Available seating may be limited and/or uncomfortable. Bring some portable outdoor chairs. An old blanket or sleeping bag on the ground is a good idea to make a space for the kids. It also keeps them off the concrete or grass. Umbrellas that hook onto chairs can be helpful but they may not work well with wind gusts.
- Canopy or tent :
It can be difficult to find adequate shade at some pools. Often there is space set aside for small tents or pop-up canopies. Five gallon buckets of water and bungee cords work well to anchor tent poles. Consider hanging an extra tarp off the back of an open tent. It can keep a lot of people dry in a sudden rain, act as a wind break or provide extra shade.

- Clothes:
Bring layers of clothes. It can be hot and sunny or cold and rainy in the same day. Bring sandals to protect the swimmers' feet on hot pool decks. Even if it is hot outside, a small swimmer can get out of the water shivering because of a breeze. Jackets, wind pants, or even a blanket may come in handy. Keep an umbrella and few rain ponchos in your car just in case.
- Sunglasses and a hat:
Do not forget to bring these items. The glare off of the water can be harsh.
- Food and Drinks:
There will be food and drink vendors at most meets. Consider bringing a cooler of ice to keep things cold. You can also bring your own water, sport drinks and healthy snacks.
- Other items to consider:
Bug spray. Allergy/asthma medication if your child has outdoor sensitivities. Bring something to read such as a book or magazine. Provide activities to keep you or your swimmer entertained between events.

Packing: Some of the items above can be left in your car in case you need them. If you are a light traveler, pick and choose from the suggestions above and travel light. If you do not like to improvise and like to have all the bases covered, then fill up that trunk. It's up to you.

Socialize: Visit with other families on your team. Try to meet families from other teams. Find out who your swimmer is hanging around with and say hello to their parents. Talk to other families who have gone to this meet before and ask them what they find useful to bring to outdoor meets or where they like to eat locally. Have fun, relax and enjoy the outdoors with your swimmer.