

Everything You Wanted to Know About Swim Meets

But Were Afraid To Ask

(Excerpt from USA Swimming's Sample Club Handbook) Please be sure to check with your swimmer's coach for specifics that may be different from the examples below.

Swim meets are a great family experience! They're a place where the whole family can spend time together. Listed below are some very in-depth guidelines geared to help you through your first couple of swim meets. It may seem a little overwhelming, but we tried to be as specific and as detailed as we possibly could. If you have any questions, please ask your coach.

Before the Meet Starts

Arrive at the pool at least 15 minutes before the scheduled warm-up time begins. This time will be listed in the meet information handed out to all swimmers and also in the team newsletter.

Upon arrival, find a place to put your swimmer's blankets, swim bags and/or sleeping bags. The team usually sits in one place together, so look for some familiar faces.

Find the check-in place. Usually, parents are not allowed on deck so this may be a responsibility of your swimmer or your swimmer's coach. Make sure your swimmer checks in with his or her coach!

Check for special posted instructions in the check-in area. Usually one will need to circle the swimmer's name or "#" before each swimmer's name, in each event he or she is swimming, that day. If this is not done, the swimmer will not be allowed to swim that event. Check-in is required so that the people running the meet know who is actually at the meet. After check-in, the meet administrators "seed" the swimmers into heats. Heat and lane assignments will be posted, so be sure your swimmer knows where to look!

Sometimes the meet is "pre-seeded" and no check-in is required. You and your swimmer can find heat and lane assignments by purchasing a program.

Once "checked in", write or have the swimmers write each event-number on his or her hand in ink. This helps him/her remember what events he/she is swimming and what event number to listen or watch for.

Your swimmer now gets his/her cap and goggles and reports to the pool and/or coach for warm-up instructions. It is very important for all swimmers to warm-up with the team. A swimmer's body is just like a car on a cold day-he/she needs to get the engine going and warmed-up before he/she can go all out.

After warm-up, your swimmer will go back to the area where his/her team is sitting and wait there until his first event is called. This is a good time to make sure he/she goes to the bathroom if necessary, gets a drink, or just gets settled in.

The meet will usually start about 10-15 minutes after warm-ups are over.

According to USA Swimming rules (because of insurance purposes), parents are not allowed on deck unless they are serving in an official capacity. Similarly, all questions concerning meet results, an officiating call, or the conduct of a meet, should be referred to a coach. He or she in turn, will pursue the matter through the proper channels.

Psyche Sheet or Heat Sheets. A psyche sheet is usually available for sale in the lobby or concession area of the pool. It lists all swimmers in each event in order of "seed time". When the team entry is sent in, each swimmer and his/her previous best time (up to the date that the entry was submitted) in that event is listed. If the swimmer is swimming an event for the first time, he/she will be entered as a "no-time" or "NT". A "no-time" swimmer will most likely swim in one of the first heats of the event. A Heat sheet may be available close to the start of the meet that lists the actual heat and lane a swimmer will be competing in.

Meet Starts

It is important for any swimmer to know what event numbers he/she is swimming (again, why they should have the numbers on their hand). He/she may swim right away after warm-up or they may have to wait awhile.

Generally, girls events are odd-numbered and boys events are even-numbered. Example: "Event #26, 10-Under Boys, 50 freestyle"

Most meets are computerized. There are generally two ways a swimmer gets to his/her lane:

A swimmer usually reports directly to his/her lane for competition a number of heats before he/she actually swims. Check with your swimmer's coach for specific instructions.

In some novice meets, a swimmer's event number will be called, usually over the loudspeaker, and he/she will be asked to report to the "clerk of course" or "bullpen". Swimmers should report with his/her cap and goggle. Generally, girls events are odd-numbered and boys events are even-numbered. Example: "Event #26, 10-Under Boys, 50 freestyle, report to Clerk of Course." The "Clerk of Course" or "bullpen" area is usually where all swimmers checked in before the warm-up.

The clerk will usually line up all the swimmers and take them down to the pool in correct order.

You can expect at least 4-8 heats of each event.

The swimmer swims his or her race.

After each swim:

He/she is to ask the timers (people behind the blocks at each lane) his/her time.

Depending on the coaches instructions, the swimmer may be asked to do some recovery swimming if a "warm down" pool or lanes are available.

The swimmer should then go immediately to his or her coach. The coach will discuss the swim with each swimmer. Some coaches may wish to talk with the swimmer before her recovery swim.

Generally, the coach follows these guidelines when discussing swims:

Positive comments or praise

Suggestions for improvement

Positive comments

Things you, as a parent, can do after each swim:

Tell him how great he did! The coaching staff will be sure to discuss stroke technique with him. You need to tell him how proud you are and what a great job he did.

Take him back to the team area and relax.

This is another good time to check out the bathrooms, get a drink or something light to eat.

The swimmer now waits until his next event is called and starts the procedure again.

When a swimmer has completed all of her events she and her parents get to go home. Make sure, however, you, as a parent, check with the coach before leaving to make sure your swimmer is not included on a relay. It is not fair to other swimmers who may have stayed to swim on a relay where your swimmer is expected to be a member and she is not there.

Results are usually posted somewhere in the facility. Awards are often gathered for a team and given to the coach at the end of the meet. The coach will give the awards to the swimmers at a later time.

What Happens If Your Child has a Disappointing Swim?

If your child has a poor race and comes out of it feeling badly, talk about the good things. The first thing you say is, "Hey, that is not like you. I know you are disappointed, but it's not the end of the world!" Then you can go on and talk about the good things the child did. Don't talk about the negative things and don't keep talking about the race. Drop it and get your child to focus on the next race or something enjoyable coming up after the meet! Limit the "post mortems!"

If your child comes up to you and says, "That was a bad race, don't tell me it wasn't," there is nothing wrong with a swimmer negatively evaluating a race. The important thing is for the child not to dwell on it. You should move the swimmer on to something good. "All right, you have had a bad race. How do you think you can do better next time?" Immediately start talking about the positive things.

What To Take To The Meet

Most important: Swim Suit, Team Cap--and goggles (if your swimmer uses them).

Baby or talcum powder--To "dust" the inside of swim cap. This helps preserve the cap and makes it easier to put on.

Towels-Realize your swimmer will be there awhile, so pack at least two.

Something to sit on. Oftentimes the swimmer area may be located in a gym or cafeteria. Example: sleeping bag, old blanket, or anything that will be comfortable to sit on. The swimmers will be spending a lot of time on it.

Sweat suits: bring one. Each swimmer may want to bring two because they can get wet and soggy.

Team T-shirts: Two or three. Same reason as above.

Games: travel games, coloring books, books, anything to pass the time.

Food: Each swimmer is usually allowed to bring a small cooler. It is better to bring snacks. They usually have snack bars at the meet, but the lines are long and most of the time they only sell junk food.

Suggestions for items to bring:

Drinks: Hi-C, Fruit juice, Gatorade, Water

Snacks: Granola bars, Fun fruits, yogurt, cereal, jello cubes, sandwiches

Once you have attended one or two meets this will all become very routine. Please do not hesitate to ask any other parent for help or information!

These meets are a lot of fun for the swimmers! He/she gets to visit with his/her friends, play games, and meet kids from other teams. He/she also gets to "race" and see how much he/she has improved from all the hard work he/she has put in at practice.

Special Parent's Note

The pool area is usually very warm. Therefore, you need to make sure you dress appropriately. Nothing is worse than being hot at a swim meet. It makes the time pass very slowly! At some of the meets, the parents are allowed to sit with the swimmers at the blanket area. If you don't think that a gym floor is comfortable, feel free to bring folding chairs to sit on. Better yet, become an official and get involved! You get to be close to the action and take the focus off of your own child!