

SWIM MEET 101

A first swim meet can be a little overwhelming for both parents and swimmers alike. As a parent, your main job is to get your swimmer to the pool on time with a properly packed swim bag. Once your swimmer enters the locker room, our phenomenal coaching staff will take over, and all that's required of you is lots of team spirit and cheering.

WHAT TO BRING

A properly packed swim bag is key to ensuring that your swimmer has what they need to get through a meet both in and out of the water and should look a little like this:

- swim suit - many swimmers keep a back-up suit in their bag, too, just in case
- goggles
- at least two towels
- bottle of water or sports drink - Some facilities do not allow anything other than water on the pool deck so please take note when reading over a meet information packet.
- flip flops or other waterproof shoes – Some facilities require swimmers to wear shoes when leaving the pool deck and slipping wet feet into tennis shoes just isn't fun. Also, it's always a good idea to slip on shoes before hitting the locker room.
- something to keep busy – As you'll soon learn, swim meets involve a lot of hurry up and wait. Your swimmer may have large chunks of time to fill in between heats so cards, a book, or small games are a welcome distraction. We recommend no electronics in swim bags, remember that the kids frequently spend their down time on deck beside the pool. Vancouver Swim Club and its coaches are not responsible for lost or damaged items.
- snacks - Kids burn lots of calories during warm-ups and races, and they need to replace that lost fuel. Some suggestions for quick, mid-meet snacks are:
 - granola or protein bars
 - fruit snacks
 - raisins
 - fresh fruit
 - chocolate milk boxes
 - cheese and whole-grain crackers
 - pretzels
 - non-fat yogurt

Now that you've got your swimmer's bag packed, you may want to pack a bleacher bag for yourself. As parents, we regularly have at least an hour of warm-ups to sit through before the meet even starts. Once events start, you may have long stretches of time between your child's events depending on the size of the meet. Here's what my swim mom bag looks like:

- Sharpie markers – Your swimmer will need to have their events/heats/lanes written on their hand, and Sharpies are perfect for the job.

- highlighter for marking heat sheets – It's not a must, but many parents like to highlight their child's name to make it easier to find their events.
- bleacher seat, towel, or cushion – Let's just say that you're going to get really good at sitting. (may need a folding chair)
- a good book or magazine – Just like the kids, you'll appreciate something to pass the time.
- small bills – Each meet has either a nominal admission or heat sheet cost, and exact change is always appreciated. Most of the meets we attend also have some sort of concession stand where you can grab some caffeine or a snack.
- extra goggles – Goggles aren't the most durable piece of equipment, and depending on your child, they may also prove to be the hardest to find. Many meets have swim vendors where you can purchase equipment on site, but sometimes it's just easier to have a spare pair in your bag.
- camera and/or video camera – Some of the pools we swim in offer great opportunities to take pictures and video. Just be aware that flash photography is strictly prohibited for the swimmers' safety and no photos can be taken behind the block.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET THERE

Now that you know what to bring, let's talk a little about what to do once you get there. On the team web site should be information on pool location, arrival time, and warm-up time. Our coaches usually ask that you arrive 15 minutes before warm-ups start. If your swimmer needs more time than that to get changed and on deck, just plan accordingly.

Once you arrive at the venue, parents usually stand in line for admissions while swimmers get to head straight to the locker room. If you don't see signs directing the kids, just ask another parent or swimmer. Swim families are generally very helpful regardless of team affiliation. Pay your admission, grab a heat sheet, and head to the stands. Hopefully you'll see a familiar face or a VSC t-shirts to sit by. There is absolutely no reason to be intimidated by more experienced VSC parents. While they may not recognize you right away, they would love for you to introduce yourself as a new parent. They're an awesome resource when it comes to learning the ins and outs of the sport.

No matter what time of day your child swims, each session begins with warm-ups. Yes, it seems like a lot of laps to swim before race events, but it's the best way for your swimmer to wake up those muscles and avoid injury.

After warm-ups, your swimmer may have time to come join you in the stands. This is when you can help them get their events on their hand and encourage them to grab a snack. If they don't have the time to come find you because of an early event, don't worry. The coaches will make sure that they get what they need. Once the meet

starts, your swimmers should stay on deck so that they don't miss their events. It's very easy to get distracted in the stands and lose track of event numbers.

Events alternate between girls and boys and are numbered. Almost all events have multiple heats (9-10 girls will usually have the most while older groups and long distance events typically have fewer). The coaches are there to make sure that your swimmer gets to the correct lane at the right time. Only USA swim coaches and USA swim officials are allowed on deck so please do not try to help your child get to where they need to be. All that's left to do is cheer on our team and show your VSC spirit!

TIMED FINALS VS. PRELIMS/FINALS

Most of the meets we attend are run in the timed finals format. This means that after all heats in an event are swam, the swimmers are ranked according to their time. Your swimmer may have won their heat, but because swimmers in later heats swam faster times, your swimmer will not place overall in the event. Conversely, your swimmer could finish in last place of the final heat and place 8th overall in a field of 40 swimmers.

Other meets, such as State and Sectionals are run in the prelims/finals format. All events are swum in a single morning session. Typically the top 8 or 16 swimmers in each event come back during the evening session to swim in two finals heats. (depends on meet) If your child places in the top two heats and is scheduled to come back, you have 30 minutes after results are posted to a) decide that yes, you will be coming back in the evening or b) choose to scratch your swimmer from the event and not swim in the evening.

If this sounds confusing, that's because it absolutely is. This is a decision best made in partnership with swimmer, parents, and coaches. The coaching staff can help you to understand the pros and cons of scratching and to make an educated decision that's best for your swimmer.

To make things even more crazy, there are alternate swimmers designated in case other swimmers do decide to scratch. If your swimmer places 17th or 18th in a prelim event, there is a very good chance that they will be swimming in the evening finals. You need to stay in touch with the coaching staff to determine this.

Why is all of this scratching/alternate talk so important? If your swimmer is set to swim in an evening final event and does not scratch or show for the event, they will be penalized. You will be charged a fine by USA Swimming—usually \$50—and your swimmer will not be eligible to swim in their next scheduled event whether it's set for that night or the next morning. Long story short, be aware that this is different from regular season meets and defer to the coaches to help guide you through the experience.

POSITIVE CHECK-IN

There will be times when your swimmer is asked to "check-in" at a meet. This involves finding check-in sheets which are usually located in the lobby or swimmer lounge area. All you need to do is have your swimmer check the events beside their name. It lets the host team know that your swimmer is there and ready to go.

There are also meets where only middle and long distance events require a positive check-in. The coaches will work to educate your swimmer on the process as this should ultimately be each individual's responsibility to check themselves in whether it be for a single event or an entire meet.