

SWIM MEET GUIDE

Adapted from USA Swimming's "Swim Meet Basics"

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.

HOW TO SIGN UP FOR MEETS

See the ALGA website for step-by-step instructions on how to sign up for swim meets using SwimConnection.com.

Remember that you must sign up for meets ahead of time, and that meets close for entry anywhere from 1-3 weeks (or more) ahead of the competition – either when they hit the limit for total number of entries or when the entry deadline passes, whichever comes first.

WHAT TO PACK FOR MEETS – CHECKLIST!

Absolutely necessary:

- _____ **Swimsuits (2)** – one that you plan to wear, and a spare.* (Team suits are encouraged, if you have one.)
- _____ **Goggles (2)** – one that you plan to wear, and a spare*
- _____ **Swim caps (2)** – one that you plan to wear, and a spare.* (Team caps are not required, but are strongly encouraged. They are available for purchase from coaches and cost \$3-5 each, depending on the style.)
- _____ **Towels** – How many?
 - for warm weather meets, 1 towel **per event** is plenty
 - for cool weather meets, when things don't dry as quickly, you'll want **2 towels per event** (1 for each warm up and 1 for each race)
- _____ **Shirt and sweatpants** to wear between races
- _____ **Healthy drinks and snacks, including plenty of water.**
- _____ **Dry change of clothes for after the meet**
- _____ **Cold weather gear for winter meets** – warm jacket/parka, waterproof boots or shoes, gloves, hat, umbrella, etc. Basically, anything that will keep you warm and dry.
- _____ **Sunscreen** – All meets in Pacific Swimming are out doors (year round, rain or shine!) so unless the forecast is for constant rain, it's possible that you'll need sunscreen even in February or March.
- _____ **Your Meet Summary** – the list of events you're signed up for, from the email confirmation that you received from SwimConnection.com
- _____ **A pen**, to write down heat and lane assignments for individual events
- _____ **Inhalers or other medications** – if your child is prone to asthmatic attacks, make sure to bring an inhaler and remind the coach that your swimmer has it with them.

*These items can rip or malfunction, so we STRONGLY advise bringing a spare of each.

Recommended, but not required:

- _____ **Blanket or folding chair(s).** Not all pools have bleachers and when they do, there's not always room on them. Bring something to sit on that you can set up near or under the team tent.
- _____ **Deck sandals** – if the weather allows, flip flops or other slippers are more comfortable to wear with wet feet around the pool deck than regular shoes
- _____ **Entertainment:** books (reading or homework), iPod or other music player with earphones, portable video games, playing cards, etc. Typically, there will be at least an hour between a swimmer's events, so there's lots of time for hanging out with family and teammates!
- _____ **Sleeping bag** – If it is particularly cool, it's nice to have a sleeping bag to rest in, between races.
- _____ **Sunglasses**
- _____ **Cash for snack bar**, if you wish. Most meets have a snack bar where food can be purchased. Always check the Meet Sheet though, to make sure. The variety of food at meets can vary dramatically. It can include everything from bagels and muffins to baked potatoes, cup o' noodles, and burgers. There is no standard menu. Bottled water, Gatorade and sodas are also typically available. If you have any specific food preferences or needs, you'll want to pack your own. Bringing your own is almost always healthier, though swimmers also almost always want to get SOMETHING at the snack bar too. ☺

BEFORE THE MEET STARTS

1. Unless your coach has said otherwise, arrive at the pool about 15 minutes before the scheduled warm-up time begins. (See the Meet Sheet for warm-up schedules. Typically, but not always, the pool opens at 7:30 am for warm up.) And note that while the warm-up period usually lasts for slightly more than an hour, many swimmers like to get there for the very start of warm up, when the pool is less crowded. It can be a little overwhelming to warm up in a crowded lane, so getting there early can be preferable. (Exception – 8 and under swimmers should check with their coach before the meet, to confirm what time they should arrive and warm up. Typically, this will be later than for older swimmers.)
2. 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, and we usually have a red Alameda Ala-Gators tent with us, so look for red tents and familiar faces.
3. Find the sign-in tables and sign in for the meet. Every swimmer must sign in him/herself before the meet begins. Always do this BEFORE you warm up, so that you don't forget later. If you don't sign in, you won't be on the list to swim your races. The sign-in tables are usually near the entrance to the facility, but if there is more than one way into the pool area, you might need to look around for it. You can also always ask passersby where the sign in desk is.
 - Sign in is always divided between Girls and Boys. The swimmer should find the correct line, and wait his/her turn to sign in.
 - To sign in, the swimmer must typically find his/her name on the sign in list (alphabetical, by last name), and sign his/her initials next to the name. S/he then follows the instructions of the sign-in volunteers to circle the events that s/he plans to swim. Note that **swimmers MUST do this themselves**. Parents are never allowed to sign in in their athlete's place.
 - If Sharpie pens are available at the check-in desk, the swimmer should then write his/her event numbers on his hand. This helps everyone remember what events s/he is swimming and what event number to listen or watch for.

- If there is a mandatory scratch-down (where too many swimmers are registered and each athlete is required to scratch from one of their events in the interest of time), check with your coach to confirm which event you should scratch. Swimmers should NEVER scratch themselves from any event without first checking with their coach.
 - Be sure to have your Meet Summary on hand, in the event that your swimmer's name is missing from the list or there are any questions about his/her registration for this meet.
4. After checking in for the meet, swimmers should talk to their coach, or the coach on duty if their coach is not there, to find out what they need to do for warm up. To repeat – the swimmers should talk to the coaches themselves. Parents are allowed to be there to listen too, but this is an important step for the swimmers to do on their own, since they are the ones who will be swimming.
 5. Next step – the swimmer gets her/his gear on and gets into the pool to warm up. Except for the very youngest of swimmers, it is very important for everyone to warm-up before the meet. 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.
 6. After warm-up, your swimmer will go back to the area where his/her team is sitting and wait there until his/her first event is called. This is a good time to use the restroom if necessary, get a drink, or just gets settled in. Also, make sure that the swimmer knows where the heat and lane assignments will be posted (more on this below.)
 7. The meet will usually start about 10-15 minutes after warm-ups are over.

ONCE THE MEET HAS STARTED

1. Events are swum in numerical order, typically (but not always), starting with older swimmers first. There is no real time schedule for meets. Do not bother asking the coach when a particular event will take place, because no one ever knows. The second event starts whenever the first event finishes, and so on. For this reason, it is very important for swimmers to constantly monitor the progress of the meet. (What event are they on now? What is my next event? Do I need to check for my heat and lane yet? Time to warm up for my next swim?) If swimmers or parents have any questions about the progress of the meet and what they should be doing at what point, feel free to ask a coach.
2. For individual events at a meet, each swimmer will be assigned a specific heat and lane to swim in. Typically, but not always, the newer and slower swimmers swim at the start of the given event and the faster swimmers swim in the later heats. Heats and lane assignments are posted in a designated area (or areas) of the pool deck. Before the meet starts, the swimmer should learn from coaches or teammates where the assignments will be posted. Lane assignments for individual events are posted throughout the day, as the meet progresses, and it is every swimmer's responsibility to check the boards regularly "to see if they are posted yet." (That is, to see if their event is posted yet.) Sometimes, the heat sheets are posted 25 minutes or more before an event, and sometimes, if things are running behind, you will see huge crowds gathered around the posting boards and the lists will only appear as the given event is ready to start. There is no hard and fast rule about when the sheets go up. You just have to keep checking.
3. As soon as an event is posted, the swimmer should memorize his/her heat and lane, and go immediately to the coach to share this information with them. This is the swimmer's responsibility, not the parent's. Coaches must know what heat and lane to watch, in order to offer feedback after each event. The swimmer should also check with the coach about procedures for warming up before the event (when they should warm up, what they should do for warm up, and whether they should check back with the coach before lining up behind the starting blocks) as well as strategies for the given race. Swimmers should not socialize after talking to their coach, but should instead focus – in a positive manner – on the race ahead.

4. By the middle of the preceding event – or at whatever point the coach has designated – the swimmer should be finished with his/her warm up and should find his/her starting block and wait behind the timers for his/her event to be announced.
5. At the start of each event, the starter will announce the event number and the distance/stroke to be swum. S/he will then announce "Heat 1", and the swimmers in heat one are expected to step behind the starting blocks.
6. When all of the expected swimmers are in place, the starter will blow one long whistle. This is the swimmer's signal to step up onto the starting block.
7. At the command "take your mark," the swimmer assumes the starting position and waits for the start signal.
8. The starting signal rings and the race is swum. (If the swimmer is new to meets, it's a GREAT idea to watch a series of starts at the beginning of the meet, to see these steps in action and have a better idea of what you will need to do when it's your turn to get on the blocks.)
9. After each swim:
 - a. The swimmer should warm down, following the coach's earlier instructions, if a "warm down" pool or lanes are available.
 - b. The swimmer should then go immediately to his or her coach. The coach will discuss the swim with each swimmer.
10. The coach follows these guidelines when discussing swims:
 - a. Positive comments or praise
 - b. Suggestions for improvement
11. Things you, as a parent, can do after each swim:
 - a. Tell your swimmer how great they 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.
 - b. Take him/her back to the team area and relax.
 - c. This is another good time to check out the bathrooms, get a drink or something light to eat.
12. The swimmer now waits until his next event is called and starts the procedure again. In between races, swimmers should rest and stay warm (cool in summer). All energy is to be stored up and used in competition. Light nutritious snacks and plenty of fluids are recommended to keep the swimmer's energy level high.
13. Results are posted somewhere in the facility and awards (typically for 1st through 8th place in each of the C, B and A divisions), are handed out at a designated Awards Table. Awards are not distributed or mailed to swimmers after the meet if not picked up, so be sure to pick up any awards before you leave.
14. When a swimmer has completed all of his/her events and has picked up any awards that he/she wishes to, the family is free to go home.