

May 26, 2020

Governor Tim Walz
Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Ste. 130
Saint Paul, MN 55155-1611

c/o Commissioner Tarek Tomes
Tarek.Tomes@state.mn.us

Re: Petition to Open Pools for Limited Purpose of Competitive Swim Practice in a
Controlled and Supervised Environment on June 1, 2020

Dear Governor Walz,

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented time and for your efforts in keeping Minnesotans safe. We are writing to advocate for a reopening of pools for competitive swim practice in a controlled and supervised environment on June 1, 2020. We have been following all communications from your office and those issued by the Minnesota Department of Health (“MDH”). On Wednesday May 20, 2020, MDH issued *Guidance for Social Distancing in Youth Sports* (the “Youth Sports Guidance”) to help youth sports teams prepare to resume sports activities on June 1, 2020.

We understand that Minnesota Swimming, Inc. (“MNSI”) has been working with representatives of your office as well as with the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission to provide valuable information regarding how competitive swim teams can safely return to the pool environment. However, under the current executive orders and guidance, competitive swim teams will not be permitted to practice because of the blanket closure of all pools. This global closure of swimming pools for any use is overly broad. Competitive swimming does not require direct contact between teammates or coaches and social distancing can be maintained throughout practice. Therefore, competitive swimming is conducive to maintaining a controlled environment in a pool separated by lanes, unlike recreational swimming, which is an unstructured environment in which participants interact more closely with each other.

We write now to show our support for MNSI’s efforts and to reiterate the importance of resuming competitive swim activities to children and communities around the state of Minnesota. Additionally, we write to inform you of the steps that our clubs – following the guidance shared by the CDC, MDH, USA Swimming and MNSI – have taken and will continue to take to insure the safety of our swimmers and coaches upon a return to the pool.

The Youth Sports Guidance recognized the importance of youth sports to the physical and mental well-being of our children stating:

...sports provide opportunities for youth to develop or maintain fitness, specific skills, mental well-being, and social emotional health. We want to support youth in engaging in sports, but we want to do it in a way that will keep them safe.

Along with athletes in other youth sports, competitive swimmers around the state will benefit greatly from a return to regular swim practices. We feel strongly that the safety protocols adopted by our swim clubs (and other clubs around the state) can meet and exceed the Youth Sports Guidance and permit swimmers to return to the pool in a controlled, supervised and safe manner. Thus, we appeal to you to permit the state's private, public or school swimming pools to re-open as soon as June 1, 2020, for competitive swim practice in a controlled and supervised environment, so long as pool owners and swim clubs can adhere to proper safety protocols and the Youth Sports Guidance.

Guidance from the CDC and USA Swimming

The CDC has stated "there is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread to people through the water used in pools, hot tubs, or water playgrounds. Proper operation and disinfection of pools, hot tubs, and water playgrounds should kill the virus that causes COVID-19." Our clubs are committed to ensuring that the pools where we swim will be properly maintained during any club use.

USA Swimming has provided a [comprehensive plan](#) which outlines what each facility should follow for a safe return to the pool. Resources are available to assist swim clubs in developing a plan to return to the pool safely.

The Youth Sports Guidance

The key recommendations from the Youth Sports Guidance are as follows:

1. Develop a program specific plan for your sports team that includes:
 - a. Social distancing;
 - b. Masking where appropriate;
 - c. Encouraging and enforcing norms of health etiquette;
 - d. Promoting health checks and screening of participants, staff and volunteers;
 - e. Enforcing stay-at-home while sick expectations;
 - f. Ensuring that policies are considerate of high-risk populations; and
 - g. Following routine disinfection protocols.
2. Create pods of participants with a maximum of 10 people in each pod.
3. Parents should not attend practices.
4. Practice outside where possible.
5. Keep interaction between players contactless.
6. Do not intermix groups.
7. Do not participate in games or tournaments.
8. Discourage sharing of equipment.
9. Avoid using locker rooms and facility showers.
10. Follow appropriate ratios for participants.

Competitive Swim Practice in a Controlled and Supervised Environment Will Meet or Exceed the Youth Sports Guidance

Develop a Plan. USA Swimming has provided swim clubs with guidance on how to return to the pool in a safe and controlled manner. Each of our clubs has adopted a plan which incorporates:

- Social distancing requirements;
- Appropriate use of PPE (including use of cloth face masks for coaches and swimmers as they enter and exit the facility);
- Proper health etiquette and disinfection protocols;
- Required daily health checks (including taking temperatures) and screening of participants, staff and volunteers;
- Strict stay-at-home while sick requirements;
- Strict requirements for how swimmers arrive / depart the building;
- Protocols for responding to a positive COVID-19 test result; and
- Documented assignment of swimmers to lanes during practice to facilitate tracing of contacts, in the event a swimmer tests positive.

Each club is requiring that coaches, families and swimmers acknowledge and certify their understanding and agreement to follow the plan requirements.

Create pods of a maximum of 10 participants/Adhere to facility guidelines for COVID-19/Follow proper ratios of swimmers. Swim practices can easily be tailored to meet this requirement. Current plans already require staggered swim practices, reduced number of swimmers in the pool at one time, and time between practices to complete disinfection protocols and to minimize interaction between swimmers. Coaches are physically removed from the swimmers while on deck and can easily enforce social distancing between coaches by posting coaches at opposite ends of the pool. All coaches will wear appropriate PPE when checking in swimmers and when interacting with swimmers.

Parents do not attend practices. Swimming does not require parent involvement on the pool deck. As a result, our plans direct that parents can wait in their vehicles for swimmers, but may not enter the facility. We have instructed families that they should not car pool to practices.

Practice Outside. If outdoor pools are open this summer, some teams may be able to swim outdoors. However, most teams can best protect swimmers in indoor facilities where optimized HVAC, air exchange, social distancing, surface sanitation and optimal chlorine and disinfection levels can be controlled on a continuous basis.

Keep interaction contactless and do not intermix groups. Swimming is an individual, non-contact sport, so practice can be conducted without physical contact. Swimmers can be spaced to ensure no contact during practice. Recently, the National Federation of State High School Associations (“NFSH”) released a [Guidance](#) for Opening up High School Athletics and Activities. The guidance classifies individual swimming as “low risk of infection” because it is a sport that can accommodate social distancing or be performed individually with no sharing of equipment

(compared with sports that involve close, sustained contact between participants and lack protective barriers).

Do not participate in meets. USA Swimming and MNSI have cancelled all sanctioned meets for the summer of 2020. At this point, we are looking for the ability to practice in a controlled and supervised environment, not compete.

No sharing of equipment. There is no need for swimmers to share equipment. Clubs can also limit or eliminate the use of individual equipment during swim practices. Swimmers are separated in lanes by lane lines and by distances greater than 6 feet while in the water.

Avoid use of locker rooms and showers. Plans provide for swimmers to arrive showered, and in their swim suits ready to swim, and to exit the building in their swimsuits. Locker rooms and showers will not be open for general use. Bathrooms and showers will be available for emergency use as needed and disinfected after each use.

Conclusion

Based upon the above, we firmly believe that pools across the state can reopen for the limited purpose of competitive swim practice in a controlled and supervised swim practice in a safe manner. We request that you provide our state's competitive swim teams the right to begin practicing on June 1, 2020, in pool settings in a controlled practice so long as they can abide by the safety criteria outlined in the Youth Sports Guidance.

We understand that this means you will need to treat pool use by competitive swim teams differently than recreational swimming. However, as shown above and in our attached SafeSplashMN presentation, the controlled environment which can be enforced during a swim practice justifies this distinction. Indeed, opening a pool for a swim practice is no different than opening a field to a soccer practice, or a gym to a basketball practice. As a result, we strongly urge you to re-evaluate a one-size-fits-all approach to the reopening of pools and to permit pool facilities to open for the limited purpose of competitive swim practice.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Stephen Zheng

/s/ Teresa Thompson

/s/ James Wise

Aquajets Swim Club
By Stephen Zheng
Its Board President

Edina Swim Club
By Teresa Thompson
Its Board President

Riptide Swim Club
James Wise
Its Board President

Enclosure: SafeSplashMN Request for Modification