Special Olympics Ohio

Swimming Rules Manual (Rev. 10/2026)

All Special Olympics Ohio Swimming events are run according to the USA Swimming Rules as the National Governing Body. Any modifications to those rules shall be found in this manual.

All Special Olympics Ohio regional and state level competitions will enforce the participation regulations for athletes and Unified partners, of which is derived from Article 1 of the Special Olympics Sport Rules. This rule shall be that each team and/or individual athlete or Unified partner, must play all eligible and rostered team members in every game unless a player is injured or has been removed due to disciplinary reasons. Coaches must notify the competition management prior to each game if players on the approved tournament roster will not be playing due to injury or disciplinary reasons, and this needs to be approved by the tournament director. Failure to play all eligible team members in each game will result in forfeit and disqualification.

UPDATES FOR THE 2026/2027 SEASON

An official order of events that will be used at both regional and state competition has been added to the end of this rule book.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

Athletes must be in a training program for at least 8 weeks prior to the Regional Competition.

To qualify for the State Swimming Competition athletes must compete at a Regional Qualifying swim meet without disqualification in their events.

Special Olympics Ohio provides a range of events to offer athletes of varying abilities the opportunity to compete. The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics Ohio. The order of events that will be followed for regional and state competition can be found in the designated section of this manual.

- 25M Breaststroke
- 25M Backstroke
- 25M Freestyle
- 25M Butterfly
- 4 x 25M Medley Relay (Traditional & Unified)
- 4 x 25 Free style Relay (Traditional & Unified)
- 50M Breaststroke
- 50M Backstroke
- 50M Freestyle

- 50M Butterfly
- 4 x 50 M Free Relay (Traditional and Unified)
- 100M Breaststroke
- 100M Backstroke
- 100M Freestyle
- 100M Butterfly
- 100M Individual Medley
- 200M Backstroke
- 200M Freestyle
- 200M Breaststroke
- 200M IM

We will not hold an event at the State Swim Meet if only 1 athlete registers in that event. Should this occur, the athlete will not be able to switch to a different event to replace the event that is not offered. If only one athlete registers for an event for regional competition, the athlete may elect to compete to receive a qualifying time, in order to possibly attend state in that event. However, a gold medal will not be given as the award. The athlete will receive a participation ribbon for their event. If more than 1 athlete enters an event, and scratches occur day of competition that result in only 1 athlete racing, the athlete will be permitted to swim and receive a medal for the place they earn.

- Athletes must be able to swim a distance of at least 25M with no assistance to be able to compete in regional and state competitions.
- We will be enforcing maximum times for events at both the regional and state swim meets. If an athlete does not meet the time requirement by the time registration is due, that athlete should not be registered for that event. If during regional competition the athlete receives a time greater than the maximum for that event, the athlete will receive a disqualification and will not be eligible to progress to state in that event. The maximum timetable can be found below:

Event	Maximum Time		Event	Maximum Time
25M Freestyle	1:20 Minutes		25M Backstoke	1:20 Minutes
25M Breaststroke	1:20 Minutes		25M Butterfly	1:20 Minutes
50M Freestyle	2:00 Minutes		50M Backstroke	2:00 Minutes
50M Breaststoke	2:00 Minutes		50M Butterfly	2:00 Minutes
100M Freestyle	4:00 Minutes		100M Backstoke	4:00 Minutes
100M Breaststroke	5:00 Minutes		100M Butterfly	5:00 Minutes
100M Individual Medley	4:00 Minutes		200M Backstroke	6:00 Minutes
200M Freestyle	6:00 Minutes		200M Breaststroke	7:00 Minutes
200M Individual Medley	6:00 Minutes		4x25M Medley Relay	4:00 Minutes
4x25M Freestyle Relay	4:00 Minutes		4x50M Freestyle Relay	5:00 Minutes

GENERAL RULES OF COMPETITION

The following modifications shall govern all Special Olympics Ohio swimming events.

- The Meet Referee, in cooperation with the Games Director, shall have the authority to adjust these rules on a case-by-case basis for the safety and wellbeing of the athletes. The Meet Referee may intervene in the competition at any stage to ensure that the appropriate regulations are observed, and shall adjudicate all protests related to the competition in progress.
- The Meet Referee shall have full control and authority over all officials, approve their assignments and instruct them regarding all Special Olympics features or regulations related to the competitions. He/she shall enforce all rules and decisions of the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules and USA Swimming rules and shall decide all questions relating to the actual conduct of the meet, the final settlement of which is not otherwise covered by these rules.
- It is preferable that certified swimming officials (including the referee, timers and judges) be used in all events, if available.
- Swimmers who have a hearing or vision impairment may request for an accommodation, included with the registration materials, which allows them to have an assistant present on pool deck during the start. Additionally, vision impaired swimmers may request for them to have a Tapper for their races. These requests must be received with the swimmer's registration and will be reviewed on a case by case basis. Please include any available details with your accommodation request.
- No competitor shall be permitted to use or wear any device that may aid his/her speed, buoyancy or endurance during a competition such as webbed gloves, flippers, fins, etc.
- Goggles may be worn by the swimmer.
- Swimmers may be assisted from the water upon request and with prior approval being granted by the meet director. Such requests should be included with your registration submission.

- Athletes may elect to start their races from the starting blocks or from in the water. For in-water starts, the athlete shall place one hand on the end of the pool or hold the starting block with one hand. Two hands on the starting block shall be used for backstroke starts.
- Athletes must swim the full distance with no physical assistance.
- Standing on the bottom in the racing course is allowed for the purpose of resting. However, any forward motion, walking on, or jumping from the bottom will disqualify the competitor. No resting is allowed on lane lines or the walls during the race.
- During competitions, coaches must remain off the pool deck, unless given prior approval from the Competition Director on a case-by-case basis. Only athletes and Special Olympics Ohio official competition personnel and staff may be on the deck at any given time.
- If electronic timing is not used, it is suggested that 3 timekeepers be assigned to each lane. In this instance, the swimmers official time and place will be taken as the average from the times recorded.
- When registering a relay team for regional competition, only 1 alternate will be allowed to be named for any relay team. There will never be more than 5 athletes named to a relay team. Only the named alternate may be substituted at regional competition, and once this occurs, the 4 athletes who swim at regional competition are the only 4 athletes permitted to swim at the state competition. If the alternate is not used at regional competition, only the 4 athletes who swam will be permitted to advance to state in that relay.

Equipment

- Swimwear must conform with the current USA Swimming rules. An exception may be granted by the Meet Referee/Meet Director for medical, cultural, religious or modesty reasons. These exceptions should allow male and female swimmers to cover a greater part/parts of the body but all swimwear must be made of textile material. For competition, all applications for an exception to USA Swimming rule on swimwear must be submitted with the swimmer's competition registration.
- Timing system: Special Olympics Ohio swimming events should use an electronic timing system if available (such as Colorado Timing Systems). If such a system is not available, events may use stopwatches. If this occurs, it is suggested that 3 timekeepers be assigned to each lane. In this instance, the swimmers official time and place will be taken as the average from the times recorded.
- Flags should be located 5 meters from each end of the pool to indicate distance to the finish, especially in respect to backstroke events. Flags should not be removed during competition or training sessions.

Relay Events

- Relay swimmers should exit the pool as soon as possible following the completion of their relay leg. Relay swimmers who cannot exit the water immediately may be allowed to remain in the

lane until all relays have finished so long as they do not interfere with the other swimmers or the timing equipment.

- A swimmer remaining in the water should move a short distance away from the end of the pool, close to the lane rope but shall not obstruct a swimmer in another lane. Obstruction of a swimmer in another lane shall cause the team to be disqualified.
- Once a team is set and competes at a regional competition, the 4-person relay team roster may not change and no alternates can be substituted for another athlete. You may elect to change the leg order, but this change must be noted in your registration and may not change after registration is submitted. Alternates can only be substituted prior to competing at the regional qualifying event.

Unified Sports Relay Events

- Each Unified Sports relay team shall consist of two athletes and two partners.
- Swimmers on a Unified Sports relay team may be assigned to swim in any order.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- An athlete with down syndrome who has been diagnosed with Atlanto-Axial Instability may not participate in Butterfly events, Individual Medley events, or diving starts.
- If in the judgment of the referee or competition director, it is determined that an athlete is not capable of completing the race distance, due to their swimming competence, and may even put his/her life in danger, the referee or competition director may make a ruling to determine if the athlete is able to continue to compete at the swim meet.

OFFICIAL ORDER OF EVENTS

The official order of events that will be used at regional and state competitions can be found below. Please note, state competition is divided up between 2 separate days as seen in the order of events below. For regional competitions, which are only 1 day in duration, the order of events will be combined into a running list of events. Additionally, any breaks in the order of events that occur during a swim meet may fall at different times. This is due to the changing number of registrants at the event and some events not occurring at all swim meets.

Order of Events Day 1

200M Breaststroke
100M Backstroke
50M Freestyle
25M Butterfly
100M Breaststroke
200M Backstroke
25M Freestyle
50M Backstroke
200M Butterfly

4X50M Freestyle Relay
4x50M Unified Freestyle Relay
4x25M Medley Relay
4x25M Unified Medley Relay

Order of Events Day 2

200M Individual Medley
50M Butterfly
100M Freestyle
50M Breaststroke
25M Backstoke
100M Individual Medley
200M Freestyle
25M Breaststroke
100M Butterfly
4x25M Unified Freestyle Relay
4x25M Freestyle Relay