

CIRCULAR

SUBJECT	ISSUE DATE	NUMBER
COVID Q&A Circular 2021/22 Season Start	Friday, 20 Aug 2021	06/21-22

To	Club Presidents, Club Captains, Club Secretaries, SLSS LSEC, SOG	
From	Peter Agnew ESM President	Scott Muir Acting Director – Lifesaving & Education
CC	BOM	

BACKGROUND

The Sydney region is a key area of concern for COVID transmission and infection. The Surf Life Saving Sydney (SLSS) boundaries are currently impacted by stringent Public Health Orders. The Delta strain of COVID acts differently to the strain experienced at the start of the 2020/21 season and different arrangements are required this season. The NSW Government strategy has moved from elimination of the virus to vaccination as a key mitigation strategy.

It is expected health order restrictions will remain until such time as vaccination levels reach government milestones. It is also expected that SLS activity will be restricted in September and October.

This Q&A Circular provides general advice from SLS Sydney Portfolio Directors to clubs in preparation for the season. Surf Life Saving NSW (SLSNSW) will also provide general updates in the next few weeks.

The following key dates and Q&A sheet provides guidance only so that clubs and members can plan the start of the 2021/22 Season. Please note that dates and guidance will change as NSW Government directives change.

PROPOSED KEY DATES

In general, it is recommended that clubs do not plan face to face activity (other than basic reduced patrol activity) during September and October. Members are encouraged to renew their membership and Patrol Services will start from 18 September 2021.

Consider planning some activity to return in November and a return to Nippers in December. Guidance on activity during November and beyond will be made on the 1 October 2021 and an updated Circular issued.

Overall, the NSW Health directives will determine suitable start dates for activity and Clubs may like to prepare/plan for an earlier or later commencement as they see fit.

Clubhouses: Clubs to remain closed for general use while stay-at-home orders are in place. Access may be granted for limited-service activity such as Patrols and as identified below.

- Plan for COVID Safety plans to be in place for staged opening.

Patrol Season: At this stage Surf Life Saving will provide a limited Patrol Service while stay-at-home orders are in place (starting 18 September and expected to continue through October). A decision about returning to full patrols for November and December patrol activity will be made on 1 October 2021.

- Plan for a limited patrol service in September and October but be mindful that NSW Government restrictions may impact beach usage and patrol activity may not proceed or be ramped up as required.

Gear Inspection: Gear inspection requirements have been modified and clubs have been advised. Additional dispensations have been put in place since the Gear Officer meetings due to additional travel restrictions – refer Q&A section below.

Education: There will be no face-to-face group training or skills maintenance while stay-at-home orders are in place. Refer Q&A section for exemptions. A decision on activity in November and December will be made on 1 October 2021.

- Plan for online program content. Face-to-face training to have a possible return from November.

Skills Maintenance: No Skills Maintenance or Proficiencies should be conducted while stay-at-home orders are in place. SLSNSW will advise arrangements for extended dates and activity shortly.

Junior Activity: No in-person Nipper programs to be undertaken while stay-at-home orders are in place. A further decision on Junior Activities will be made on 1 October 2021.

- Plan for a December start date with registration to commence in November 2021 following the October 1 update.

Surf Sports Competition: No group events to be undertaken while stay-at-home-orders are in place. A further decision on Surf Sports will be made on 1 October 2021.

- Plan for a November onward carnival program.

LIFESAVING AND PATROLS

Q1. What are the arrangements for Patrols this season?

It is expected that Public Health restrictions will be in force at the start of the Patrol Season. SLSS have defined three levels of Patrolling based on the extent of health orders.

These include:

- Full Patrols (where minimal restrictions are in place).
- Reduced Patrol Service – minimum LSA requirements (where restrictions are in place).
- No standard Club Patrols provided - Support Operations Patrols supported by Club Call-Out Teams to provide coverage (extensive restrictions in place).

Q2. What should we be planning for?

SLSS are planning for a different Patrol Service (minimum LSA requirements) to be undertaken in September and October, and regular communications meetings with the Director of Lifesaving and Club Captains will be held to update Patrol requirements in liaison with Local Government.

Additional water coverage may be required as the public move to some of the remote and unpatrolled coastal locations so an additional back up IRB may be requested by the Support Operations Group to provide water coverage of these areas along the coastline

Q3. Who can Patrol?

- Proficient Active Members.
- Members not restricted by Local Government Area lock down.
- Clubs may recommend additional advice on Patrolling Members as required.

Q4. Do I need to be vaccinated to patrol?

Refer Vaccination Q&A below.

Q5. What if I don't feel safe turning up for Patrol?

Members will not be compelled to Patrol while public health orders are in place. Members should make an individual decision about Patrolling and liaise with their club.

Q6. Do I need to social distance on Patrol?

Social distancing is an important part of transmission prevention however there will be times where Emergency Service Workers will not be able to maintain 1.5m distance (such as IRB Driver and Crew or in managing a patient). General COVID precautions should be taken as per the Clubs COVID plan.

Q7. Do I need to wear a mask while on Patrol?

Public health orders largely determine where and when a mask is required to be worn. Currently masks are not mandatory outdoors (unless specified in locked down LGA's). Masks should be worn in enclosed workspaces such as gear sheds and Clubhouses while undertaking Patrol. Members may choose to wear a mask as part of their outdoor surveillance operations. Masks should be worn when social distancing cannot be maintained (eg treating a patient). It is not recommended to wear masks in aquatic activities.

Q8. Can I Patrol if I'm from a locked down Local Government Area?

While exemptions can be granted in certain circumstances, members should not leave locked down areas to participate in Lifesaving activities. Club Members should check in with the Club Captain and Club Captains should liaise with the SLSS Director of Lifesaving where required.

Q9. Can I Patrol if I'm outside the distance/travel requirements of current health orders

SLSNSW has an exemption process in place to fulfill its public safety obligations. The intent of public health orders is to minimise movement so Clubs should endeavor where possible, to use Members from the local area when restricted travel is in place. If required, the exemption process should be used to assist in maintaining suitable coverage.

Q10: Does the Club need to meet the requirements in the Lifesaving Service Agreement?

Lifesaving requirements may change from the standard Club Lifesaving Service Agreement (LSA) and the Director of Lifesaving will define requirements from time to time.

Q11. What other safeguards can I put in place to protect myself, other Members and the community?

- Not attending Patrol if you have any symptoms.
- Consider getting a COVID test 48 hours prior to Patrol and after Patrol.
- Being vaccinated prior to any Lifesaving activity.
- Keeping social distancing while on Patrol with fellow Team Members and the community where possible.
- Create a patrol team bubble – do not connect with patrol change over teams etc
- Be familiar with your Clubs COVID Safety Plan and follow Club directives.
- SLSNSW will be supplying COVID PPE to Clubs soon.

Q12. What will happen if beaches are closed?

The Director of Lifesaving will follow the SLSS COVID Plan if beaches are closed, and Club Captains will be advised. Patrol Members will often exit the beach and provide surveillance from the clubhouse.



GEAR INSPECTION

Q13. How and when should we undertake Gear Inspection?

Gear Officers have been briefed about suitable arrangements for Gear Inspection Teams to undertake Gear Inspection by 8 September. With the addition of the 5km, some Clubs will find it problematic to inspect their full complement of gear and equipment. If this is the case, an extension may be granted by the Director of Lifesaving and a minimal set of equipment may be inspected for Patrol purposes only. The club can inspect this core set of equipment such as Defib, Oxy Viva, FA, IRB, Spinal Board, Rescue Board, Tube, Radios or this can be undertaken by the District Lifesaving Co-ordinator on the first patrol etc. Liaise with the DOL for details.

Auxiliary equipment such as manikins, spare IRB's and extended equipment beyond a set of core Patrol and First Aid equipment can be inspected later in the year.

The intent is to have a set of core Patrol and First Aid equipment that is fit for purpose for Patrolling activity.

VACCINATION

It is expected that government policy on vaccinations will change over the next several months. Here are some brief guidelines.

Q14. Do I need to be vaccinated to Patrol or perform Lifesaving duties?

To protect Members and the community SLSS strongly recommends that Patrol Members, Trainers, Assessors, Facilitators and Age Managers be fully vaccinated before returning to public safety and group management duties.

Where there are Public Health Orders in place to limit community movement (stay at home orders etc) and that a reduced public safety service is provided to safeguard the public at beaches, Clubs / services may wish to select Members that have been vaccinated to undertake these duties.

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) does not have a Membership Vaccination Policy and the organisation does not have a Policy of mandatory vaccination of Members.

Some Members will have legitimate reasons based on doctors' advice for not being vaccinated.

Q15. Can Members be asked if they are vaccinated?

During restricted health orders and for the safety of Members and the community during periods of community transmission, Clubs and services may enquire if Members have been vaccinated prior to undertaking service activity. It should not be compulsory to answer this vaccination question and questions should be framed as:

During this time of community COVID transmission/increased risk, and to protect you, other Members and the community, can you please advise us if you have been vaccinated (it is not compulsory to respond to this question)?

- Yes - I am fully vaccinated with two vaccinations.
- Yes - I am partially vaccinated with one vaccination.
- No - I am not vaccinated.
- Undisclosed - I do not wish to disclose this information.
- Other comment

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Q16. What is the youngest age that can be vaccinated?

Currently if you are 16 years of age or over and eligible you can have a vaccination.

It is expected that this age will be reduced at some stage during the year. Vaccination for 12yo-16yo is a key area of interest for SLSS and ongoing reviews of this area will be monitored.

Q17. Where can I get vaccinated?

Emergency Services Personnel (Active Patrol Members etc) are part of the Phase 1B Category vaccine rollout, meaning vaccines are available for all Frontline Patrolling Members (Bronze/SRC). Some services are assisting with priority service for this category. SLSNSW is a gazetted emergency service and is eligible under this phase.

It is noted that vaccination has generally now moved on from the Phase 1B Category and vaccination is open to most of the general population over the age of 16. This means that Members will now need to research their local vaccination points for waiting times. The Phase 1B Category is eligible for vaccination at the NSW Health Vaccination Centre at Sydney Olympic Park however vaccination waiting times may be longer at this venue.

Some Clubs have reported good success with covidqueue.com to check possible vaccination sites

The SLSS Support Operations Team will provide advice around local hubs that may be of assistance to Clubs (see memo to Club Captains 16 August).

Our Partner, Sydney Airport is currently reviewing options for us to use their vaccination hub under the 1B Category.

Access to Rapid Antigen Testing for Patrol Members is also being explored.

EMERGENCY SERVICE EXEMPTIONS

Q18. Can I use the Emergency Service Exemption to travel to my Club?

The use of Emergency Service Exemptions will be fluid and will change with health order requirements. A risk assessment approach will be undertaken by SLSNSW and the requirements for exemptions will be distributed from time to time. SLSNSW will provide details of applying for exemptions. Members should check with their Club Captain and Club Captains should liaise with the SLSS Director of Lifesaving and the Education Manager when in doubt.

Q19. Who can approve health order exemptions?

Currently SLSNSW CEO is approving individual exemptions on a case-by-case basis. See updates on the SLSNSW COVID website page

EDUCATION

Q20. Can we conduct Lifesaving award training/assessment?

We encourage online training to continue while health order restrictions are in place. General face-to-face and group award training/assessments are not able to be conducted during stay-at-home orders unless approved. Plan for group award training to start in November and further updates will be provided on 1 October 2021.

While gathering restrictions are in place, exemptions for face-to-face training shall be limited to supporting critical operational Lifesaving requirements e.g. conducting emergency training to fulfil obligations of a Lifesaving Service Agreement (LSA). Such training must be approved by the SLSS Education Manager before proceeding to SLSNSW for exemption approval.

Q21. Do I need to undertake a skills maintenance this season?

SLSNSW will provide details on changes to skills maintenance. This will include a reduction of the face-to-face component and timing.

Q22. How do we recruit and retain our members?

Recruitment of new Members will be impacted by the current health orders. Consider registration of new Members and undertaking online theory training in the short term.

SLSNSW will be reinitiating the Member recruitment promotional material post restrictions.

Members should be encouraged to rejoin and ways to engage and be involved in education, lifesaving and surf sports will form ongoing discussions with portfolio Directors.

JUNIOR ACTIVITIES

Q23. What arrangements are in place for Nipper programs this year?

Young people are emerging as a risk group for the Delta strain of COVID19. A best guess is that Nippers under the current circumstances will not be undertaken this side of Christmas due to:

- The age group falling outside the vaccinated population
- The numbers gathering at Nipper programs
- The transmissibility of the Delta Strain within this age group

We would recommend that Clubs hold off in planning any Nipper activity until December 2021 and that a decision be made on the 1 October 2021 about the progression strategy of this activity and its start date. NSW Government policy on returning to classrooms will be a good indication of progress in this area.

Q24. Should we be registering Nippers for this season?

This will be a Club decision, but SLSS would recommend holding off on registrations until a further decision is made on 1 October 2021. This may save the Club extra administration relating to fee refunds etc. Clubs should consider reviewing their budgets considering a reduced season. Clubs may consider registrations early for Active Kids Vouchers.

Q25. Can Nippers undertake water training activities.

The same exercises rules apply to Nippers and water activity training. Only two (2) Members can train together under the current health orders. As water safety requirements apply to Nipper aquatic training this becomes problematic. Training in groups is in breach of current health orders. Nipper exercises will need to meet health order distance requirements

SPORT

Q26. What arrangements are in place for Surf Sports Carnivals?

It's envisaged that Surf Sports Carnivals will again be broken down into chunks similar to last year. This will have an impact on carnival dates, local government approval process and the carnival program. Updates will be provided as health order requirements change.

Clarification on arrangements for the Aussie Titles in WA, so that early planning can be considered, is underway.

Q27. Can we undertake squad training?

Current public health orders for training indicate that exercise may only be undertaken in pairs for Members who live in the 5km radius while accessing Club competition equipment is allowed. Emergency Service Exemptions do not apply to this activity.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information can be found on the SLSNSW COVID Information page.

<https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-updates-resources-slsnsw-clubs>

Further questions, amendments or suggested questions to this Q&A Circular can be directed to the SLSS Club Development Officer at clubdevelopment@surflifesavingsydney.com.au or the relevant portfolio director.

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