

Swim teachers, coaches and life
savers should consider integrating
these practices as standard
procedure.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN
WATER SPORTS



MANAGING HEARING TECHNOLOGY IN WATER ENVIRONMENTS:

ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES FOR SWIM
TEACHERS, COACHES, LIFESAVERS
AND STAFF

REMEMBER:

ADULT

SUPERVISION AT ALL TIMES

This resource provides critical information for supervising children with hearing aids and cochlear implants in aquatic settings. While modern hearing technology offers some resistance to everyday moisture (e.g., sweat, light rain), it typically requires additional protection or removal to ensure safe use in water. Removing a child's hearing technology can lead to significant communication barriers, impacting their safety and participation.

Protecting Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants Around Water

Hearing aids and cochlear implants are sophisticated electronic devices highly susceptible to damage from moisture, heat, and humidity.

MOISTURE EXPOSURE: Direct moisture compromises electronic components, promotes corrosion (especially in saline environments), and significantly shortens battery life.

THERMAL DAMAGE: Excessive heat can inflict severe and irreparable damage to devices.

Key Protective Measures:

SUNSCREEN APPLICATION

PROTOCOL: Always apply sunscreen to the child's ears, face, and neck prior to device placement, ensuring it is fully dry. Hands must be thoroughly washed and dried before handling and reinserting devices.

CLEANING KIT ACCESSIBILITY:

Maintain a readily available cleaning kit for immediate removal of any contaminants (e.g., sunscreen, sand) from moulds or microphone ports.

PROTECTIVE HEADWEAR: Advise the use of hats or visors specifically designed for compatibility with hearing aids or cochlear implants.

HUMIDITY MANAGEMENT: On humid days, recommend a loose-fitting hat to facilitate air circulation, preventing moisture build-up around the devices.

SECURE STORAGE: If devices are removed, store them in a protective container in a cool, dry location. Never leave devices in hot environments such as direct sunlight in a car or an exposed school bag, as this causes significant damage.

Swimming with Hearing Aids or Cochlear Implants

Hearing aids and cochlear implants represent a substantial investment and are generally not designed for immersion in water.

COCHLEAR IMPLANTS: Waterproof Accessories: Specific waterproof accessories are available for many cochlear implant processors, enabling children with implants to participate in swimming. If a child was not provided with a waterproof accessory, advise parents/carers to consult their audiologist.

WITHOUT WATERPROOF KIT: If a waterproof kit is not available, ensure the external components of the implant (speech processor and headpiece) are removed before the child enters the water.

HEARING AIDS: Water Resistance vs. Waterproofing: Currently, fully waterproof hearing aids are not available for children. Most hearing aids are classified as 'water-resistant,' meaning they tolerate sweat or light rain. However, they are not designed for full immersion and must not be submerged in water.

SAFE STORAGE: When removed, store hearing aids securely in a clearly labelled waterproof container or dry bag.

Swimming with Grommets

Surgical advice regarding swimming with grommets can vary. Some surgeons may recommend avoiding water exposure to prevent middle ear infections. If a surgeon permits swimming, strict precautions are mandatory:

Post-Operative Recovery: Prohibit swimming for a minimum of three weeks following grommet insertion surgery.

Water Quality: Limit swimming to chlorinated pools. Avoid lakes or non-chlorinated water sources, which may contain high bacterial counts.

Avoid Pressure: Prohibit diving or jumping into water, as this forces water through the grommet into the middle ear.

Headwear: Mandate the use of a swimming cap.

Ear Protection: Implement the use of custom swim moulds and neoprene head bands.

Methods for Preventing Water Entry into the Ears

When water exclusion is medically advised, specific protective measures are essential:

SWIM MOULDS: Recommended for children post-grommet surgery, those with recurrent ear infections, or perforated eardrums.

FEATURES: Swim moulds are available in various styles and colours, often featuring small handles for easy insertion/removal and a connecting neck cord. They are typically manufactured from floating material.

CUSTOM FIT: Custom-made swim moulds are fabricated from an impression of the child's ear canal, providing a precise, silicone seal. These must be re-fitted as the child grows to maintain effectiveness.

AUDITORY IMPACT: Be aware that swim moulds will temporarily reduce a child's hearing level. Students with mild deafness who typically function well without hearing aids will experience reduced auditory input.

EAR PUTTY: Mouldable ear putty is available from pharmacies or specialist swim retailers. Similar to swim moulds, ear putty will temporarily increase the child's level of deafness.

NEOPRENE HEADBANDS: These are designed to secure swim moulds or ear putty. While not universally necessary, they are a recommended option when complete water exclusion from the ears is medically advised.

Proper Application of Ear Putty and Swim Moulds:

SURFACE USE ONLY: These products are exclusively for use on or near the water's surface. They are not suitable for underwater swimming or diving, as water intrusion can occur under pressure.

LAYERED PROTECTION: Ensure the child wears a tight-fitting swim cap or a neoprene headband over the ear putty or swim moulds for enhanced security and seal.

SEAL ENHANCEMENT: Apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly (e.g., Vaseline) to the mould or putty to improve the seal around the ear canal.

HYGIENE: Ear putty and swim moulds are personal items and must never be shared.

Bone Conduction Hearing Devices

Bone conduction hearing devices are currently not waterproof and lack protective water accessories. These devices must be removed prior to swimming or participation in any water-based activities

In case of Water Immersion Incidents:

Should a hearing device accidentally become immersed in water, immediate retrieval is critical. Follow these steps:

INITIAL DRYING: Gently shake the device to dislodge excess water, then use a soft cloth to dry the exterior thoroughly.

DISASSEMBLY: Remove batteries, earmould, and tubing.

CONTROLLED DRYING: Store the device in a warm (not hot) environment, such as a dedicated drying box, or utilise drying capsules for a minimum of 24 hours. These items are available from audiology departments.

ALTERNATIVE DRYING METHOD: As an alternative, place the device in a sealed container of uncooked rice to absorb moisture, ensuring the battery door is closed to prevent rice ingress.

If the hearing device remains non-functional after 48 hours, contact the audiology department immediately.

Under no circumstances should the device be placed in a microwave or oven, as this will result in irreversible damage.

Additional resources on water-safe accessories for cochlear implants can be found here:

www.cochlear.com/au/en/shop/accessories/water-safe-accessories/?viewAll=true

DID YOU KNOW?

Open Water isn't just for swim schools. If you offer activities or programs on the beach for children or young people, we'd love to have you on our side!

For further information about Deaf Children Australia.

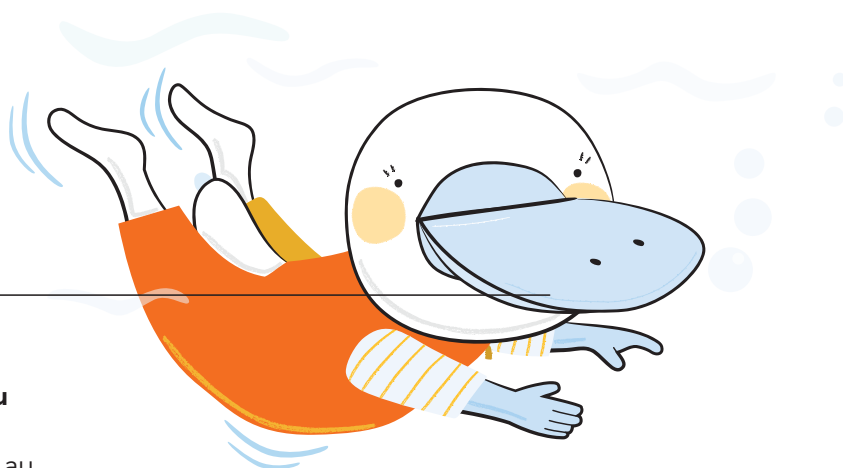
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Deaf Children Australia uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all degrees and types of hearing loss.
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