



April 30, 2020

RE: Public Health Need to Open Swim Schools and Learn-to-Swim Programs

Dear Governor DeSantis

We are writing to ask you to consider the serious public health need to open swim schools and learn-to-swim programs in our communities.

As you know, learning to swim is a life-or-death skill, essential for every child. Formal swim lessons between ages 1 and 4 can help reduce the risk of drowning by 88% according to a study conducted in 2009.<sup>1</sup> Drowning is the number one cause of death for children ages 1 to 4 and a leading cause for young people up to 14 years of age.<sup>2</sup> We believe drowning to be at an even higher risk now as the schools, daycares and other children's activities are currently closed. This gives children more time to find a body of water such as a backyard pool, neighbor's pool, community pool, inflatable pool, sink, toilet, filled bathtub, bucket, ditches filled with rainwater, ocean, lakes, and rivers. A young child can drown in less than 2 inches of water.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, parents have even more distractions than ever, including remote working while children are home and are unable to supervise their children at all times. Even before this pandemic, 9 out of 10 child related drowning deaths happened when a caregiver was supervising.<sup>4</sup> 69% of children who drowned were not expected to be at or in the pool, yet they were found in the water and 77% of drowning victims had been out of sight for less than five minutes.<sup>5</sup>

Private swim schools in Florida educate over 50,000 children per week to learn to swim and, unlike public pools, our programs are controlled learning environments. We understand that modifications will need to be put in place according to guidelines. While an instructor needs to

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<sup>1</sup> Association Between Swimming Lessons and Drowning in Childhood, A Case-Control Study: Ruth Brenner, et al., 2015 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4151293/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/campaigns/drowning-prevention/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> [https://downloads.aap.org/DOPA/Drowning-Prevention/is\\_your\\_baby\\_crawling\\_english.pdf](https://downloads.aap.org/DOPA/Drowning-Prevention/is_your_baby_crawling_english.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Research from National SAFEKIDS campaign, <https://www.cnn.com/2004/HEALTH/05/27/drowning/>

<sup>5</sup> Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) <https://www.momsteam.com/sports/swimming/safety/grim-statistics-on-child-drownings>

stay within a reachable distance from a non-swimmer, we are committed to taking concrete steps to ensure social distancing within all other aspects of our facilities. We have already purchased face shields and masks for all instructors.

There is no way to teach water survival or swim skills remotely, and the health risk from COVID-19 in instructional settings should be very low. According to the CDC, the chlorine/bromine in our swimming pools should inactivate the virus in the water. Chlorine/bromine is a disinfectant. There is no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to people through the water in pools. The industry is working to establish best practices, and we are willing to engage in a science-based dialogue with health officials regarding which measures would be appropriate for learn-to-swim programs.

We hope you will agree that teaching swimming is essential to keeping our children safe. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lisa Zarda, Executive Director of the United States Swim School Association at [lisa@usswimschools.org](mailto:lisa@usswimschools.org) or 480-447-4987. We look forward to working together to reduce the risks to our children and communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

#### Signatories

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