

Position Statement

Change Room Access

1.0 Executive Summary

It has been identified that there no standard guide for use of change rooms of the opposite gender by a young child. While Swimming Australia, Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) and Swim Australia do not propose a definite maximum age for a child being able to access a change room for the opposite gender we do provide a recommended guideline and some considerations based on extensive research.

2.0 Purpose of the position statement

This document aims to inform individuals and organisations about the considerations that should be taken into account when deciding what age children should be allowed to access a change room of the opposite gender.

If you are a facility owner responsible for setting a policy you can use this position statement to inform your policy decision. If you are a parent you can use this position statement to balance the protection of your child and the respect for other users of the facility.

3.0 Who is this position statement for?

This position statement is aimed to act as a guide for the following people or organisations:

- Swim Schools
- Swimming Clubs
- Aquatic Facilities
- Local councils
- Coaches
- Teachers
- Parents
- Children

4.0 Considerations

This important issue primarily relates to, for example, a mother wanting to bring her seven year old son into the female change rooms. Such wishes are generally the case when the parent does not feel comfortable letting the child go by themselves into the same gender change room, which could be occupied by adults they have little or no knowledge of.

It has been argued that children from the age of five go to school and go to change room/toilets by themselves. However children of such a school age have access to change room/toilet facilities that are independent of adults being present.

While children develop at a varying rate, we do know many children by the age of five, are starting to understand gender differences.

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Also to be considered are reports that some adults do not feel comfortable with 'older' children of the opposite gender coming into their change room. For example, a mother getting changed after participating in a baby class, may not like a seven year old boy 'staring' at them. Although the change room structural environment may not be easily altered, appropriate behaviours and expectations for each person within the change room can be taught e.g. respecting other's privacy by not staring. An option could be the use of signage to communicate expectations.

Use of family change rooms or pool side changing cubicles can provide families with a private changing environment as an alternative to the main change room.

Research has revealed that commonly the maximum age range for accessing opposite sex change rooms is from five to eight years.

Useful information comes from the NSW Government: Practice Note 15 Division of Local Government – Department of Premier and Cabinet (Note this is a guideline for Councils):

Under Ordinance No.52 of the former Local Government Act 1919, the maximum age at which children could be taken into a change room used by the opposite sex was eight years. This provision does not exist under the current Local Government Act 1993. Therefore, this is a matter for council discretion.

Different policies have developed among councils throughout NSW in relation to this issue. Information provided by a sample of councils showed that the maximum age permitted to use change rooms for the opposite gender ranged from four years, to school age, or up to seven or eight years.

The Aquatic and Recreation Institute of Australia recommends that children aged seven years and under be allowed to use change rooms for the opposite gender.

All patrons should be given clear and direct instructions that undressing or changing in public areas around the pool deck is not allowed. Pools will get more complaints from patrons about public nudity of a child or adult than they will from alternative options not meeting their individual needs. Parents need to acknowledge that a naked child alongside the pool is confronting to other patrons. In saying that, all requirements must extend to every person and adults should be governed by the same requirements as to prevent children being exposed to adult nudity in public areas.

All operators should encourage patrons to seek information from staff whenever they are unsure as to what options are available.

Where a Swim Schools comes under the jurisdiction of a certain authority (eg Local Council or State Government), they may be compelled to adopt the Policy of the authority.

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5.0 Conclusion

1. We recommend that facilities use a maximum age between 5-7 years to enter the opposite gender's change rooms.
2. Where possible, consideration should be given to the provision of:
 - a. signage so people understand their obligations;
 - b. pool deck showers;
 - c. family change areas;
 - d. on-deck individual change cubicles;
 - e. council rules; and
 - f. ensuring people understand undressing or changing in public areas around the pool deck is not appropriate;

Facilities have the control to make their own decisions around these considerations but as the peak body we are providing this advice and encourage swim schools and swimming clubs to work with their swimming families and local community to achieve a 'best-fit' or most appropriate solution.

6.0 References

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NSW Government: Practice Note 15 Division of Local Government – Department of Premier and Cabinet