

Para-Swimming Information Sheet

About the Sport

Since the first Paralympic Games in Rome, Italy, in 1960, Para-swimming has been a feature of the Paralympic program. Like the Olympic Games, athletes compete in backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, freestyle and medley events.

The International Swimming Federation's rules are followed with a few modifications, such as optional platform or in-water starts for some races, and the use of signals or 'tappers' for swimmers with a vision impairment. No prostheses or assistive devices are permitted in the water.

Who can compete?

Para-Swimming is open to athletes with an intellectual, physical or vision impairment. Athletes are required to submit medical reports and meet the minimum impairment criteria in order to compete.

Eligible impairments	Description	Minimum Impairment Criteria
Loss of limbs	Partial or complete absence of bones or joints due to amputation or deficiency from birth.	Arm: one arm – more than 2/3 loss of one palm OR shortened arm of similar length; complete loss of four fingers on both hands. Leg: More than 1/2 loss of one foot or more than 3/4 loss on both feet.
Muscle weakness/ Impaired muscle power	Muscle weakness or paralysis from conditions such as muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, nerve damage, spinal cord injury or other spinal condition.	Leg: Loss of strength in a hip, knee, ankle or foot that impacts on swimming. Arm: Loss of strength in a shoulder, elbow, wrist or hand that impacts on swimming.
Co-ordination impairments - Hypertonia, Ataxia, Athetosis	Impairments from neurological conditions such as acquired brain injury, cerebral palsy and multiple sclerosis that affect co-ordination and smoothness of movement and balance.	Co-ordination or movement difficulties in at least one arm or leg.

Restricted joint movement/ Impaired passive range	Restricted movement or tightness in a joint/s from conditions such as joint fusions and other restricting conditions.	Joint movement restriction in one major joint that impacts on swimming.
Short Stature	Reduced standing height and limb length from conditions such as achondroplasia or other conditions that affect growth.	Height less than or equal to 145cm (males) / 137cm (female).
Leg length difference	Significant difference in leg length due to a deficiency at birth or trauma.	The difference must be at least 20cm between both legs.
Intellectual Impairment	An IQ of 75, and impairments in adaptive behaviour (conceptual, social and practical skills) – that is observed before the athlete is aged 18.	
Vision Impairment	Impairment of the eye structure, optic nerves or pathways, or vision area of the brain, resulting in a loss of vision in both eyes. Caused by conditions such as albinism, macular degeneration, macular or cone rod dystrophy and retinitis pigmentosa.	Visual acuity loss in both eyes (how far they can see) with best corrected vision. Vision is less than or equal to 6/60 (log MAR 1.00); or Visual field restriction in both eyes (how wide they can see) of less than 40 degrees diameter with best corrected vision.

Para-Swimming Sport Classes

The prefix for each class identifies the stroke;

S denotes the class for freestyle, backstroke and butterfly

SB denotes the class for breaststroke

SM denotes the class for individual medley

Sport Classes	Description (Guide Only)
Swimmers with a Physical Impairment	
S1, SB1, SM1	Swimmers who have significant movement difficulties in arms, legs and trunk. Swimmers use a wheelchair for everyday mobility. Swimmers start in the water for all strokes, use assistance for water exit and entry and complete all strokes on their back.

S2, SB1, SM2	Swimmers have significant movement difficulties in arms, legs and trunk, but with more propulsive ability in arms or legs than S1 swimmers. Swimmers use water starts and assistance with water entry.
S3, SB2, SM3	Swimmers with some arm movement but with no use of their legs or torso; or swimmers with significant restrictions in all four limbs. Swimmers use water starts and assistance in the water.
S4, SB3, SM4	Swimmers with good use of arms and some hand weakness with no use of their torso or legs; swimmers with significant limb loss to three or four limbs. Swimmers usually start in the water.
S5, SB4, SM5	Swimmers with good use of arms, but no torso and leg movement; swimmers with some limb loss in three or four limbs. Some swimmers may start in the water and may have difficulty holding good body position in the water.
S6, SB5, SM6	Swimmers with short stature; swimmers with good arms, some torso and no leg movement; swimmers with significant impairment down one side of their body (limb loss or co-ordination difficulties).
S7, SB6, SM7	Swimmers with short stature; good arms and torso control and some leg movement; or swimmers with co-ordination difficulties or limb loss down one side of the body.
S8, SB7, SM8	Swimmers with full use of their arms and torso with good hip and some leg movement; or swimmers with limb loss of two limbs; swimmers without the use of one arm. Swimmers use regular starts, strokes and turns and may have some difficulties with timing of their strokes.
S9, SB8, SM9	Swimmers with weakness, limb loss or co-ordination difficulties in one arm or leg only. Swimmers use regular starts, strokes and turns, but have some difficulties in applying even power to the water.
S10, SB9, SM10	Swimmers with minimal impairment that affects one joint, usually their foot or hand. Starts, turns and strokes are smooth and fluid.

Swimmers with a Vision Impairment	
S11, SB11, SM11	Swimmers who are blind. Swimmers must wear blacked out goggles for competition and use a tapper as they approach the end of the pool. Swimmers often count strokes to know the length of the lane and anticipate turns.
S12, SB12, SM12	Swimmers who have very low vision in both eyes either in how far they can see (visual acuity <2/60; LogMAR 1.5-2.6 inclusive) or how wide they can see (visual field <10 degrees diameter). Swimmers have the option to use a tapper.

S13, SB13, SM13	Swimmer who have low vision in both eyes, but more vision than S12 swimmers. Vision is affected either in how far they can see (visual acuity <6/60; LogMAR 1-1.4 inclusive) or how wide they can see (visual field < 40 degrees diameter). Swimmers may elect to use a tapper.
Swimmers with an Intellectual Impairment	
S14, SB14, SM14	Swimmers with an intellectual impairment. Swimmers may find it more difficult to pace consistently and plan event tactics.
Not Eligible	
Not Eligible (NE)	Swimmers do not meet the minimum criteria for the Para-sport classes, but may still be able to compete. Contact Swimming Australia for more information.

Find out more

To get involved or for more information contact:

Swimming Australia

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Note: The classification information provided is intended as a guide only. Only authorised classifiers are able to provide a formal classification in accordance with the rules of the sport. Not all classes may have events at the Paralympic Games.