

November 17, 2020

Message from Swim Alberta

I realize there has been much discussion and concern from the swimming membership as it relates to the announcement on Thursday by the Government of Alberta and the CMOH Order 37-2020 (Order).

Along with all of you, Swim Alberta was surprised by the announcement and had only been given the heads up about an hour prior to the press conference that sport groups may be impacted.

Since the announcement on the 12th, and the Order coming into effect on the 13th Swim Alberta has worked with a number of municipalities, facility providers, Government of Alberta (Sport Physical Activity and Recreation - SPAR and links into Alberta Health) and numerous provincial sport organizations to understand what the Order means, how we can all collaborate and, share a consistent message to our memberships across the province.

It is no surprise that I have heard from a number of frustrated clubs, coaches and swimmers on how unfair the Order seems to be and the impacts to athletes and clubs. Swim Alberta agrees that the CMOH Order 37-2020 has created some confusion and has targeted a group who has worked diligently to follow previous Health Orders, requirements put in place by Swim Alberta as it relates to Return to Swimming and has done an exceptional job of safely returning to sport. It does feel very targeted when our swimmers are not able to train, their parents still need to work their bingo shift, their cousin may be attending a wedding, and the neighbor has stopped at the local restaurant/bar on their way home from work. I understand this is not fair to our athletes.

I would like to stress that Swim Alberta continues to work hard behind the scenes, advocating for swimming (and sport) to the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health. We have tirelessly done this since the start of the Pandemic and continue to do so. I, the staff and board of Swim Alberta want to see our clubs vibrant and athletes training, as much as you do. Also similar to you, we all agree this needs to be done with safety as the primary focus and in full alignment with Alberta Health and all municipal regulations.

Some of what we are doing:

- Today, I met directly with Alberta Health. This meeting was facilitated by SPAR. Although the Order will not be changed at this point, I was given additional clarity on such; and was able to create an awareness of the impact of the Order as it relates to the physical fitness, mental health and safety of athletes. I created a better understanding of our sport, specifically that while we have recreational pieces in our organization, we have serious, committed provincial, national and Olympic athletes that train and compete together. More to come on this.
- We are pulling an advisory group together to study and support the successes of swimming. This group will be led by Dr. Norris and focus on scientific study and research supporting, the physical and mental health benefits of competitive swimming and the environment in which we train.
- Conducting a follow-up to the work Swimming Canada did with club programs earlier on the fall as it relates to a safe return to swimming, so we can demonstrate the success we have had as a province. Kevin Dennis will be reaching out to clubs shortly to begin to gather this information in a way that can be used in Alberta.
- Developing and pulling together resources to support the mental health needs of our athletes and coaches.
- Ongoing work with facilities across the province to support clubs navigating the current restrictions within the Order.

How can you help?

- This was a decision of the UCP MLA caucus and leadership as much as it was a decision of Alberta Health. You have the right to share your voice and concerns, therefore, with your MLA.
- The messaging to your MLA should be focused on the sound work that has been done and offer solutions as we go forward. Examples of this would be:
 - Swim Alberta as your Provincial Sport Association and governing body has established rigorous Return to Swimming Requirements that clubs have effectively put into place and followed since June of 2020.
 - Clubs have ensured athletes have a safe place to train with professional coaching staff on deck, implementing daily screening and ensuring not only the physical health of athletes, but also the support and identification of mental health needs of athletes, an area Swim Alberta will be continuing to address.
 - Swim Alberta and Clubs have worked closely with facility partners to ensure the safe return of swimming cohorts and, in many situations, facilities have accommodated with separate entrance and exit from the general public or other enhanced protocols.
 - Clubs have followed all guidelines and restrictions with minimal individuals testing positive and no known transmissions in swimming.
 - The positive effects of participating in a sport cohort.
 - Solution focused: prepared to continue to follow all requirements of Swim Alberta, facilities etc in alignment with Alberta Health and willing to further ensure that distancing is happening at all times when not in the chlorinated water.
- Clubs – share your stats and information with Swim Alberta. If you have information that we can compile to help pull together a safe return again to swimming, we will certainly work through it. This can be sent to Kevin or Steve.

However, despite all the elements described above, I would ask you to consider the following:

- Swim Alberta is required to follow the Order and ensure all clubs/affiliated programs also follow the Order.
- No exemptions have been granted to other sports under the Order, regardless of what you may be hearing from other amateur sport clubs or private lesson operators.
- In working closely with the Government, Alberta Health has advised that sports should not be looking to find “loopholes” within the Order as it will only create further problems and may have consequences for not adhering to the Order.
- Appreciating there are many great solutions you have forwarded from other parts of the world and country, and although these solutions may work in other places under other types of health Orders, in Alberta we need to follow the CMOH Order 37-2020.

Following the AGM on Wednesday, November 18th, Dean Schultz, President of Swim Alberta and I will take some time to highlight what has been done, and possible next steps. We are happy to record this portion of the meeting, so it can be shared if helpful with those not attending the AGM.

I appreciate this has been a frustrating time for many, and thank you for your patience as we navigated through the Order and sought the clarity needed.

Stay safe and stay well,

Cheryl Humphrey
Executive Director, Swim Alberta