

Para swimming information sheet

About the sport

Para swimming is swimming for people with impairments resulting from a health condition (disability). Para athletes can have a physical, visual or intellectual impairment, and compete in a variety of classes depending on the severity of their impairment and the resulting activity limitation to perform each stroke. Para swimming competitions include freestyle, backstroke, butterfly, breaststroke and medley events.

Classification explained

In Para sport classification provides the structure for fair and equitable competition to ensure that winning is determined by skill, fitness, power, endurance, tactical ability and mental focus, the same factors that account for success in sport for able bodied athletes, and not just based on impairment.

The Para sport classification assessment process identifies the eligibility of each Para athlete's impairment and groups them into a sport class according to the degree of activity limitation resulting from their impairment.

Classification is sport specific as an eligible impairment affects a Para athlete's ability to perform in different sports to a different extent. Each Para sport has a different classification system.

Standard Classification in detail

Para swimming caters for three impairment groups - physical, visual and intellectual.

Sport Classes

The sport class names in swimming consist of a prefix "S", "SM", or "SB" and a number. The prefixes stand for the event and the number indicates the sport class the athlete competes in the respective event. The prefixes stand for:

- S: Freestyle, Butterfly and Backstroke events
- SM: Individual Medley
- SB: Breaststroke

Sport Classes 1-10: Physical impairment

There are ten different sport classes for athletes with physical impairment, numbered 1-10. A lower number indicates a more severe activity limitation than a higher number. You will notice that athletes with different impairments compete against each other. The impact of their impairment on swim performance, however, is similar.

Sport Classes 11-13: Visual Impairment

Swimmers with visual impairment compete in the sport classes 11-13, with 11 meaning a complete or nearly complete loss of sight and 13 describing the minimum eligible visual impairment. Athletes in sport class 11 compete with blackened goggles.

Sport Class 14: Intellectual impairment

Swimmers with intellectual impairment who also meet the sport-specific criteria compete in sport class 14.

Mixed Classification Format

During some events such as the NZ Open Swimming Championships Para swimming races are run in mixed classification format. Para swimmers with different classifications will compete in the same race with the winner of each race calculated by comparison to the world record. The time that is within the closest percentage of the World Record time in that Para swimmer's class wins.

For further information visit www.paralympics.org.nz/Pathway/Classification

Note - The New Zealand Para Swimming Programme is run by Paralympics New Zealand.