

Summary of the September 2025 revisions to the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education (OPASSE)

The following document contains a **summary*** of the changes to the OPASSE for the 2025-2026 school year. If you have any questions regarding the changes, please email Ask Ophea at safety@ophea.net

***Note:** This document is not an exhaustive summary of all changes and is not meant to replace reviewing all information related to the activity prior to commencing an activity.

Legend:

E_C = Elementary Curricular

E_IM = Elementary Intramural

E_IS = Elementary Interschool

S_C = Secondary Curricular

S_IM = Secondary Intramural

S_IS = Secondary Interschool

Revision to Swim Test Requirements for Water-Based Activities

The successful completion of a swim test is no longer a requirement for participation in Watercraft activities which require all students to wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD) at all times in, on and around water. Teachers are now required to gather information about a student's swim ability, comfort and experience for the purposes of program planning with a Sample Swim Ability and Swim Comfort Assessment Questionnaire Form. The revision to the requirements for participation are a result of an extensive consultation process and evidence review, including current drowning prevention research. The goal of the review was to ensure consistent and robust safety practices, while reducing participation barriers. The rationale for removing the swim test as a requirement for participation in Watercraft activities is rooted in research indicating that a one-size-fits-all test may not accurately reflect student safety in different water environments, may pose access issues, and can create unnecessary barriers for students who are non-swimmers or experience discomfort in water. The revised approach enhances safety by centering teacher awareness, context-based assessment, and tailored program modifications.

For activities where PFDs are not required, an in-water assessment continues to be required but now better aligns with the specific skills needed for each activity.

Concussion Protocol

Ophea's concussion protocol was updated to align with the evidence-based recommendations outlined in the [6th International Consensus Statement](#) on Concussion in Sport (June 2023), following the international conference held in Amsterdam in October 2022. These updates addressed key areas including return-to-school strategies, return-to-sport/physical activity planning, and the management of symptom exacerbation during recovery. In response, stakeholders such as Parachute Canada, Ophea, PedsConcussion, and the Coaches Association of Ontario collaborated to revise concussion safety policies, codes of conduct, and implementation supports to align with the new guidance, while ensuring continued compliance with PPM 158 and Rowan's Law. School Boards should establish a process and a timeline to transition from their current concussion policy and procedures to the updated content of the *Concussion Protocol*. The rationale for these updates was to reflect current international best practices, strengthen student safety and recovery processes, and ensure that Ontario's education sector remained responsive to emerging research and consistent in concussion management across all school and extracurricular settings.

Disability-Centred Safety

Building on last year's [Disability-Centred Safety](#) work, Ophea has continued to proactively plan and identify potential barriers for students to be included. As part of ongoing efforts to make OPASSE more inclusive, select safety standards were reviewed and updated to better reflect the diverse needs of Ontario students, including students with disabilities. These edits aimed to remove barriers and clarify how educators can create safe, accessible learning environments for all students. The rationale for these changes is grounded in the understanding that not all students can participate safely or fully under a one-size-fits-all approach. By embedding principles of equity, inclusion, diversity, and accessibility into the safety standards, OPASSE better supports educators in adapting activities and encourages full participation in physical education and school-based physical activity.

Emotional Safety

The [Emotional Safety Tool](#) was developed to support educators in reflecting on and strengthening the emotional safety of students in learning environments. While the Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum emphasizes the importance of both physical and emotional safety, the OPASSE has primarily focused on physical safety.

Emotional safety refers to an environment where students feel safe, included, and supported to express themselves and participate in physical activity. When educators intentionally integrate emotional safety into program planning and daily practice, students are more likely to engage fully, form positive relationships, take healthy risks, and enjoy their learning experiences. These conditions are essential for meaningful participation and effective learning in Health and Physical Education.

This tool is designed to encourage teacher reflection and strengthen their daily practices (for example, instruction, assessment, evaluation, and relationship building) to better support all students' well-being and sense of belonging.

New Activity Pages

E_C, S_C - Road Tennis

Rationale:

A new activity page for Road Tennis was added to the list of OPASSE activities as a result of an external request. This activity page aligns with [Ophea's Vision and Strategy](#) where children and youth value and enjoy the benefits of healthy, active living and creating opportunities where every student feels that they belong in their school community. Road tennis is growing in popularity across Ontario, and adding Road Tennis supports developing an inclusive Health and Physical Education program, which is vital to a student's personal, social and academic development.

E_C, S_C - Swimming (Recreational)

Rationale

A new activity page for Swimming (Recreational) was added to the list of OPASSE activities to provide a definition for and qualifications required by teachers when engaging their students in recreational/free swim which are different from the qualifications required for Instructional Swimming. Safety standards related to the use of PFDs and specific activities also vary. Dividing these two swimming activities into separate activity pages ensures that teachers are referencing and following the appropriate standards for each type of swimming activity.

Revisions to Activity Pages

E_IS, S_IS – All activity pages designated as “High Risk Activities”

Introduction

The following was removed:

“High Risk Activity”

Updated to:

This activity includes additional safety standards specific to **Qualifications** and **First Aid** (previously designated High Risk).

Rationale:

Designating activities as “High Risk” was removed as the intention of OPASSE is to mitigate the risks associated with activities by developing minimum safety standards to be followed. The updated language provides more direct information about the additional safety standards specific to Qualifications and First Aid that the other activities do not have.

E_C, S_C – All Swimming activity pages

Definitions

Previous definition:

- **Instructional Time:**
 - Instructional time is defined as time during which there are organized activities or instructions. Examples of instructional time are lessons, events, practice, and games.

Updated to:

- **Instructional Time:**
 - Time during which there is formal instruction and/or instructor-led activities. Examples of instructional time are lessons, events, practice, and games.

Rationale:

The definition for Instructional Time was expanded to clarify that the focus is on Teacher/Certified Aquatic Instructor led activities for the purpose of the development of swimming and water safety skills.

Previous definition:

- **Recreational Time:**
 - Recreational time is defined as time during which there are not any organized activities or instruction.

Updated to:

- **Recreational Time:**
 - Time during which there is no formal instruction or instructor led activities.

Rationale:

The definition for Recreational time was revised to clarify that the focus may be student led activities, independent practice of skills and/or a free swim but does not include Teacher-led activities.

E_IM, S_IM – Combatives (Martial Arts); Wrestling

Introduction

New safety standard has been added:

Only “light contact” activities are permitted.

Rationale:

This new safety standard was added to ensure alignment with provincial regulations under the Combative Sports Act.

Definitions

A new definition has been added:

- **Light Contact:**
 - As per the [Ontario Regulation 507/24: General](#), “light contact” means the use of combative sport techniques in a controlled manner so that any physical contact is not intended to result in physical harm to the opponent or would not be reasonably expected to result to in physical harm to the opponent.

Rationale:

This new definition was added to ensure alignment with provincial regulations under the Combative Sports Act.

E_IS, S_IS – Wrestling

Introduction

New safety standard has been added:

Schools must comply with the Minister of Sport’s approved rules for amateur combative sports outlined in the [Ontario Regulation 565/24: Rules for Combative Sports](#). This includes following the [Ontario Official rule sets of Amateur combative sports events](#).

Rationale:

This new safety standard was added to ensure alignment with provincial regulations under the Combative Sports Act.

E_C - Softball (Lob Ball/Slo Pitch/Three Pitch)

Equipment

Previous safety standard:

Use a ball that is appropriate to the skill level of the students (for example, soft, compressible sponge ball). Regulation/official or hard, flight-restricted softballs must not be used.

Updated to:

- A ball (for example, soft, lighter weight, smaller size, compressible) that is appropriate to the skill level and ability of the students that has a softer or lower-density core and a softer cover material than regulation/official balls must be used.
- Regulation/official or hard covered flight-restricted softballs must not be used.

Rationale:

This update has been made to align with current research on ball safety and the necessary safety considerations, while also providing greater clarity on the type of ball that should not be used.

E_IS, S_C, S_IM, S_IS - Softball (Lob Ball/Slo Pitch/Three Pitch); S_IS - Softball (Fast Pitch)

Equipment

New safety standard has been added:

The pitcher is required to wear a face protection/mask when a regulation or hard restricted flight softball is being used. Face protection/mask must be properly fitted and properly worn, and must be commercially and specifically manufactured for pitchers. The pitcher is not required to wear a face protection/mask when using a non regulation softball (for example, soft, compressible sponge ball).

Rationale:

This new safety standard was added to ensure alignment with Softball Canada and the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations.

E_IS, S_IS - Interschool Cheerleading (Acrobatic)

Supervision

New safety standard has been added:

A Community Coach may not be a participant in the activity.

Rationale:

This new safety standard was added to increase clarity that a Community Coach cannot also be a participant in the same activity. An individual who has accepted the responsibility to coach participants cannot effectively and safely fulfill coaching responsibilities during practices or competitions while simultaneously training and competing.

S_IS – Football (Tackle)

Special Rules/Instructions

Previous safety standard:

- There must be a minimum of 4 full days in between each team's regular scheduled games. However, in the event of unforeseen circumstances (for example, weather), make-up or rescheduled games must be scheduled with a minimum of two full days in between (for example, if a team has a regular scheduled game on Monday and that game must be rescheduled, it could be played the same week on the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday, while still having 2 days between the rescheduled Friday game and the next regular scheduled game the following Monday).
- There must be a minimum of two full days in between each team's scheduled playoff games (for example, if a team has a playoff game on Monday, their next game can be as early as Thursday).

Updated to:

- There must be a minimum of 4 full days in between each team's regular scheduled games. If games must be rescheduled (for example,

weather), there must be a minimum of 2 full days in between regular season games. For example, if a team has a regular scheduled game on Monday, which must be rescheduled, it could be played on any day during the same week, while still having 2 days between a rescheduled Friday game and the next regular scheduled game the following Monday). The minimum number of days required between games also applies to individual player participation in league and playoff games.

- There must be a minimum of 2 full days in between each team's scheduled playoff games and individual player participation in scheduled playoff games (for example, if a team has a playoff game on Monday, their next game can be as early as Thursday).

Rationale:

This update has been made to clarify the minimum rest requirements between games apply not only to teams collectively but also to individual player participation in league and playoff games. This ensures adequate recovery time where individual players might be involved with multiple teams or rescheduled games.

E_C, E_IM, E_IS, S_C, S_IM, S_IS – Swimming (Instructional)

Previous activity name:

Swimming

Updated to:

Swimming (Instructional)

Rationale:

The activity name has been updated to guide users to the appropriate OPASSE pages for different types of swimming activities – specifically distinguishing between Instructional Swimming and Recreational Swimming. This distinction is essential, as each has different standards, including PFDs/Lifejackets, Supervision, and Qualifications requirements.

E_C - Kindergarten/Primary Grades (Wheel Activities)

Equipment

Previous safety standard:

Students riding tricycle on school property are not required to wear helmets. If students ride tricycles on public sidewalks/roadways they must wear a properly fitted (as per manufacturer's guidelines) and properly worn CSA approved bicycle helmet.

Updated to:

Students must wear a properly fitted (as per manufacturer's guidelines) and properly worn CSA approved bicycle helmet when participating in wheeled activities (e.g., tricycles, scooters, balance bicycles) on public sidewalks/roadways. Students are not required to wear helmets when participating in wheeled activities (e.g., tricycle, scooters, balance bicycles) on school property.

Rationale:

This update has been made to clarify that the helmet safety standards apply to all wheeled activities, not just tricycles.

Special Rules/Instructions

Previous safety standard:

- Instruct students on the proper riding techniques.
- Check that the size of the equipment must be appropriate for the rider.
- Emphasis is to be placed on controlled riding.
- Instruct students that racing must not be done.
- Instruct students to keep a safe distance from each other.
- Outline the following safety rules to be followed for each activity.

Updated to:

- The size of the equipment must be appropriate for the rider (for example, feet must touch the ground when seated on a balance bike).
- Allow single riding only (exception: wagons)
- Instruct students on the following:
 - Maintain a safe distance from each other

- Maintain contact with the equipment at all times (for example, seated at all times, two hands on handlebars at all times). If riders are on wagons arms and legs must be inside at all times.
- Emphasize controlled and same direction movement. Races are not permitted.
- Ensure safe stopping for students to get on and off
- Additional standards apply to wagons:
 - Maintain contact with the equipment at all times (for example, arms and legs must be inside at all times).
 - Maximum of two riders permitted.
 - Students may pull the wagon but must not push the wagon.
 - Wagons must be stopped for riders to get on and off.

The following safety standards have been removed:

- **Tricycles**
 - Riders must be seated at all times when pedaling.
 - No standing on the back of the tricycle.
 - One person on the tricycle at a time.
 - Two hands on the handlebars at all times.
 - All riders are to travel in the same direction in the designated area.
 - Students are to use designated area to get on and off the tricycles.
 - No riding on the play structure ground cover or under the structure.
 - Tricycles are size appropriate for height of child. (Toes are able to touch the ground on both sides of the tricycle.)
- **Wagons**
 - Wagons must be stopped for students to get on and off.
 - Riders must be seated at all times with arms and legs inside the wagon.
 - Maximum of two riders.
 - NO pushing the wagon from behind.
 - Student pulling the wagon must walk.
 - Wagons are to travel in the same direction in the designated area.
 - No wagons on the play structure ground cover or under the structure.
- **Scooters**
 - One person on the scooter at a time.
 - Two hands on the handle grips at all times.
 - All riders are to travel in the same direction.
 - Students are to use designated area to get on and off the scooter.

- No scooters on the play structure ground cover or under the structure.

Rationale:

The references to safety standards specific to each wheeled activity in Special Rules/Instruction were removed to increase clarity, remove duplication, and align safety standards for wheeled activities with similar risks.

Outdoor Education Activities

The water-based Outdoor Education activities have been updated to streamline and increase alignment and clarity across all activities. Updates are primarily focused on the Equipment, Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery, Facilities, and First Aid sections of the following activities:

- S_C, S_IM – Backpacking/Hiking - Backcountry;
- S_C, S_IM – Backpacking/Hiking - Local;
- S_C, S_IM – Canoeing;
- S_C, S_IM – Canoe Tripping;
- S_C, S_IM – Flatwater Stand Up Paddle Boarding (SUP)
- S_C, S_IM – Flatwater Kayaking;
- S_C, S_IM – Kayak Tripping;
- S_C, S_IM – Paddle Rafting

Note: If new standards have been developed, a rationale will be provided.

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Canoeing); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Flat Water Kayaking); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Flatwater Stand Up Paddle Boarding (SUP)); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Canoe Tripping); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Kayak Tripping)

Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

Previous safety standard:

Students must be provided with a clothing and equipment list prior to the activity.

Updated to:

Students must be knowledgeable about suitable clothing required for the activity (e.g., appropriate fabrics, recommend layering principles, list of items).

Previous safety standard:

A process must be established to check student clothing and equipment prior to the trip.

Updated to:

Prior to departure, student gear must be checked to ensure they have all of the appropriate/required clothing and footwear.

Previous safety standard:

Clothing (in layers where appropriate) and footwear (that is, closed-toed shoes that provide traction when on land) appropriate for the activity, location and environmental conditions must be worn.

Updated to:

Clothing (layers, rain gear when appropriate) and footwear (closed-toed shoes that provide traction when on land) appropriate for the activity, location and environmental conditions must be worn.

Safety standards removed:

- Determine that all necessary clothing and footwear are included prior to departing on the excursion.
- Rain gear is encouraged.

Facilities

Previous safety standard:

Appropriate environmental and sanitary practices (for example, washroom routines) must be taught.

Updated to:

Students must receive instruction on appropriate environmental and sanitary practices (for example, washroom routines).

Special Rules/Instructions

Safety standard removed:

Select properly fit and properly secure personal protective equipment (P.F.D.)

Definitions

Definition removed:

- Lifeguard, Assistant Lifeguard and Aquatic Instructor:
 - Refer to the Qualification section.

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Canoeing); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Flat Water Kayaking); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Flatwater Stand Up Paddle Boarding (SUP))

First Aid

Previous safety standard:

A fully stocked first aid kit must be readily accessible. (Consult Sample First Aid Kit).

Updated to:

A fully stocked first aid kit must be readily accessible. (Consult Outdoor Education Sample Kit Contents).

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Canoe Tripping)

Introduction

The following safety standards have been added:

- The Outdoor Education (Canoe Tripping) safety standards as well as the safety standards of the Outside Activity Provider must be followed.
- Consult Outdoor Education (Swimming - Leisure) if leisure swimming is included as an associated activity that takes place at a Designated or Non-Designated Swim area (for example, at camps or municipal swim areas) when not on a watercraft or land-based trip.

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Flat Water Kayaking); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Flatwater Stand Up Paddle Boarding (SUP))

Definitions

The following definitions have been added:

- Assistant Trip Guide:
 - An individual who has the required certifications, knowledge, and skills to assist the Trip Guide during a trip. The Assistant Trip Guide may be responsible to lead and monitor a sub-group during parts of the trip. This role could be fulfilled by a teacher, volunteer, or an Outside Activity Provider and must be approved by the school/school board.
- Water Safety Supervisor:
 - Refer to the Qualifications section.

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Flatwater Stand Up Paddle Boarding (SUP))

Equipment

Previous safety standard:

Determine that all of the necessary equipment is included and is safe for use prior to departing on the excursion. Students must be encouraged to report equipment problems to the Teacher.

Updated to:

Determine that all equipment is safe for use (for example, no sharp corners, cracks, or splinters). Students must be encouraged to report equipment problems to the Teacher.

Safety standard removed:

There must be one paddle per SUP, with some spare paddles taken along in case of broken or lost paddles.

The following new safety standard has been added:

At least one spare paddle (for day trips) must be carried by a Qualified Instructor only.

Rationale:

A spare paddle, carried safely by the Qualified Instructor, on day trips, is required in case one of the paddles in the group breaks. Students are not to carry spare paddles on the board as it is a safety concern/hazard for students.

The following new safety standards have been added:

- Watercraft
 - Leashes are required.
 - Any gear needed (for example water bottles, dry bags, safety kits) must be secured safely away from paddlers stance area.

Rationale:

Leashes have been added to prevent the board from “getting away” from the paddler and to also prevent the board from “squirting” towards other paddlers if the one paddler falls off the rear of the board. In addition, the standard requiring gear being secured safely was added to ensure that it does not impede or injure the paddler.

Supervision

The following safety standard has been added:

When the activity involves paddling away from a sheltered bay or base camp, and/or involves a day trip, there must be a minimum of three (3) adults supervising/monitoring the activity. If the Qualified Instructor is also the Water Safety Supervisor, two (2) other individuals with the knowledge and skills are required to assist the Qualified Instructor. These roles could be fulfilled by a Teacher, a Volunteer, or an Outside Provider, and must be approved by the school/school board.

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Paddle Rafting)

Equipment

The following safety standard has been added:

The loading of a raft with people and/or gear must not exceed the manufacturer's load capacity rating.

Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

The following safety standards have been added:

- Students must be knowledgeable about suitable clothing required for the activity (e.g., appropriate fabrics, recommend layering principles, list of items).
- Prior to departure, student gear must be checked to ensure they have all of the appropriate/required clothing and footwear.
- Clothing (layers, rain gear when appropriate) and footwear (closed-toed shoes that provide traction when on land) appropriate for the activity, location, and environmental conditions must be worn.
- Dry change of clothing must be kept in a watertight bag/container.
- Articles (for example, jewellery and clothing) that could become tangled, caught, or cause injury or restrict the student in the event of an emergency must not be worn.

Safety standard removed:

Determine that all necessary clothing and footwear are included prior to departing on the excursion. Clothing (in layers where appropriate) and footwear appropriate to the activity, location and environmental conditions must be worn. Rain gear and/or a dry change of clothing kept in a watertight bag/container must be accessible.

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Kayak Tripping)

Introduction

Previous safety standard:

Canoeing Moving Water and White Water Rafting above Class II, and White Water Kayaking, are not appropriate activities at the secondary level. For Class I and Class II Rivers Consult:

Updated to:

Canoeing Moving Water and White Water Rafting above Class II, White Water Kayaking, as well as White Water or Surf SUP, are not appropriate activities at the secondary level. For Class I and Class II Rivers Consult:

The following safety standards have been added:

- The Outdoor Education (Kayak Tripping) safety standards as well as the safety standards of the Outside Activity Provider must be followed.
- Consult Outdoor Education (Swimming - Leisure) if leisure swimming is included as an associated activity that takes place at a Designated or Non-Designated Swim area (for example, at camps or municipal swim areas) when not on a watercraft or land-based trip.

Equipment

Previous safety standard:

Determine that all of the necessary equipment is included and is safe for use prior to departing on the excursion. Students must be encouraged to report equipment problems to the Teacher.

Updated to:

Determine that all equipment is safe for use (for example, no sharp corners, cracks, or splinters). Students must be encouraged to report equipment problems to the Teacher.

Previous safety standard:

A set of maps for canoe trip location including marked access and potential evacuation locations must be available. A GPS unit may be used as an additional navigational tool, but must not be used in place of print maps. An identical map set should also be available to the Principal/Designate and local emergency contact (for example, park official, area police station).

Updated to:

A set of maps for kayak trip location including marked access and potential evacuation locations must be available. A GPS unit may be used as an additional navigational tool, but must not be used in place of print maps. An identical map set should also be available to the Principal/Designate and local emergency contact (for example, park official, area police station).

S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Backpacking/Hiking - Local); S_C, S_IM – Outdoor Education (Backpacking/Hiking - Backcountry)

Special Rules/Instructions

The following new safety standards have been added:

- Prior to students crossing or wading through water:
 - Teacher/Trip Guide must assess the following conditions to mitigate potential risks to select the safest and most accessible route for a safe crossing:
 - Environmental (e.g., air, wind, water temperature)
 - Water (e.g., speed and direction of current, visibility)
 - Riverbed (e.g., available traction, slope, evenness, firmness)
 - Visible obstructions (e.g., sticks, roots, rocks)
 - Distance between shores
 - Ease of access to enter and exit water
 - Teacher/ Trip Guide must have a rescue throw rope readily accessible to assist students to cross safely and/or in case of emergency.
 - The depth of water at the established route for crossing must not be deeper than a student's knee.
 - All crossings must occur after sunrise and one hour before sunset.
 - Student must receive instruction on the safety rules and precautions before entering the water:
 - Cross only at the designated area
 - Strategies to maintain balance
 - Face direction of flow
 - Do not remove footwear
 - Stay with the group
 - Unbuckle sternum and hip pack straps and loosen shoulder straps for quick removal in the event of a fall

Rationale:

Updates to the Special Rules/Instructions to include standards on crossing or wading through water were added to increase clarity and provide direction for Teachers/Trip Guides when approaching water/waterways on hiking and backpacking trips.