

Dear Coaches,

Required Downloads!

In 2007, USA Swimming implemented a forward racing start certification protocol. Based on observation, coaches use their expertise to certify that each athlete is capable of consistently and safely performing shallow forward racing starts on demand in 4 feet of water (The minimum depth for starts in competition is 4 feet.)

At the 2015 USAS Convention, the USA Swimming House of Delegates adopted safety guidelines for teaching and performing backstroke racing starts. In 2018, the Operational Risk Committee's recommendations for Backstroke Start Teaching Protocol and Certification were adopted. The recommendations took care to keep this process as streamlined as possible for coaches. This new certification is now combined with the Forward Start Certification adopted in 2009. **The new requirement (Backstroke Start certification) is to be effective on May 1, 2018.** The 2007 Forward Start Certification protocol and 2009 rule amendment requiring a depth of 6 feet for teaching racing start remain unchanged and in effect.

USA Swimming worked with the American Red Cross (ARC) during this process and the ARC will update its *Safety Training for Swim Coaches Manual* in 2018. The updated materials emphasize the importance of appropriate safety measures in teaching racing starts, including the proper progression for novice swimmers for both forward and backstroke starts.

As always, teaching racing starts shall only take place under the direct supervision of a USA Swimming member coach in at least 6 feet of water. The definition of teaching racing starts now includes a requirement that a USA Swimming Member Coach certify that a swimmer is proficient in performing all racing starts. The certification process includes the completion of a Racing Start Certification Procedure and Checklist which is included in

the [Complete Forward and Backstroke Start Protocols and Checklist](#).

What follows is a list combining the previous requirements for the Forward Start with the new requirements for the Backstroke Start.

The [Complete Forward and Backstroke Start Protocols and Checklist](#) contains information and an explanation of these changes:

1. USA Swimming Safety Notice to Parents. This provides basic information to parents and emphasizes their responsibility in making sure their swimmer does not attempt to perform a racing start in less than six feet of water if they have not been properly certified. A copy of this Notice to Parents should be given to the parents of every swimmer and should be displayed prominently and regularly on team bulletin boards, web sites, in newsletters and in any new members packets.

2. Racing Start Certification Procedure and Checklist. This process is required to be completed for every swimmer. Additional information and requirements are shown in the attached document.

3. Frequently Asked Questions on Racing Start Certification. This should answer most of the questions that may arise regarding the certification process and use of the new Checklist.

This certification process is very important to the safety of our athletes and provides additional protection for our coaches in the event of an injury to an athlete. If you have any additional questions or need additional guidance regarding this,

please contact [Tom Avischious \(719-866-3555\)](mailto:tavischious@usaswimming.org) tavischious@usaswimming.org at USA Swimming Headquarters.

Team Unify has been notified of this new requirement and will do their best to incorporate the new backstroke start checklist into the electronic checklist that they currently offer for the forward start as close to the May 1 deadline as possible.

Click to download the [Complete Forward and Backstroke Start Protocols and Checklist](#). In addition, a hard copy of the complete notice is in the process of being mailed to all clubs.

Forward AND Backstroke Start Certification Requirements

I. Certifying Athletes for BOTH Forward and Backstroke Starts

A. For swimmers with less than one-year experience and for swimmers age 10 years and under:

The swimmer must have satisfactorily completed the appropriate forward racing start teaching progressions as set forth in the Racing Start Certification Checklists included in this document package. The American Red Cross Safety Training for Swim Coaches

Manual has the Forward Racing Start Checklist and will include the backstroke learning progression after a 2018 update.

B. For swimmers with more than one-year experience and/or swimmers age 11 and older:

Certification is based on the coach's observation that the swimmer is capable of safely controlling the depth of his or her racing starts.

C. Backstroke Racing Start With the Ledge

If an athlete will use the ledge in competition, certification with the ledge is required. If an athlete will not use the ledge in competition, certification with the ledge is not required. The same age stipulations as in (A) and (B) above apply.

II. Water Depth (from Rulebook Section 103.2, page 45)

“Minimum water depth for teaching all racing starts, prior to certification, in any setting from any height starting blocks, from backstroke ledges or from the deck shall be 6 feet (1.84 meters) measured for a distance of 3 feet 3-1/2 inches (1.0 meter) to 16 feet 5 inches (5.0 meters) from the end wall.

Teaching racing starts shall only take place under the direct supervision of a USA Swimming member coach and shall include:

A. All racing start instruction until a swimmer has been certified by his or her USA Swimming member coach as proficient in performing a racing start, and

B. Subsequent to certification, instruction which seeks to alter a swimmer's basic technique in performing a racing start.

Prior to certification, all racing starts must take place from a position in the water, regardless of pool depth. Subsequent to certification, practicing of racing starts may take place in water depth of four (4) feet (1.22 meters) and deeper.

III. In all cases, the certification is based on the coach's professional judgment.

IV. Each club is responsible for retaining, for three years, an electronic or paper certification form for each of its swimmers.

There is no requirement that these forms be sent to an LSC or to officials responsible for any competition.

V. If a swimmer is certified at one club and then transfers to another, the swimmer must be recertified at the new club.