



Merchant Taylors

Open-water Swimming

2026

Pre-swim Information

Sponsored by: **ZONE3** 

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Dear Swimmer,

We are looking forward to welcoming you to Merchant Taylors Lake, the number one venue for open-water swimming in the South of England.

BEFORE WE GO INTO THE OTHER DETAILS PLEASE NOTE THAT MERCHANT TAYLORS IS A PRIVATE VENUE AND THERE IS NO ACCESS TO THE SITE OUTSIDE OF THE BOOKED SESSION

It is likely that at the extreme ends of the season, the water temperature will be less than 11 degrees. Swimming in cold water brings an additional level of risk and should always be approached with caution. Please familiarise yourself with the **Cold Water Facts and Advice** on the final page.

Location, Travel and Parking

Address:

Merchant Taylors' Senior School
Northwood, Middlesex, HA6 2HT

Getting there:

<https://www.mtsn.org.uk/contact-us/getting-here/maps/>

Arriving at the venue

There is no pedestrian access other than through the main gates to the Car Park

Parking

On arrival, please follow the parking signs to reach the car park at the bottom of the hill. If the bottom car park is full, use the overflow car parks higher up the drive. Please observe the following school rules:

No speeding, speed limit is 10mph.
Use dedicated car park spaces.
Do not park on double yellow lines.
Do not park in a disabled bay unless you have a blue badge, and it is visible.

Cycling

There is bike racking available at lakeside for anyone wishing to arrive by bike.

Session times

Your booking is valid for swimming any time during the session. Registration will not open until 10 minutes before the advertised swim session.

The swim session will not start until the water safety team are in place. You will be advised by the lakeside manager, who will be in communication with the water-safety team.

How long you remain in the water is up to you. 10 minutes before the end of the session, the water safety team will start to guide swimmers to return to the swim exit



Ability

This activity is not suitable for non-swimmers. This applies to juniors and adults alike. If you are in any doubt about your ability to swim safely in open-water, we recommend that you book a session with one of our recommended coaches. Drop us an email for more info.

Toilets

Toilets are available in the OMT building next to the car park. If they are locked, ask the team at lakeside.

Changing Rooms and Showers

There are changing tents at lakeside and access to the changing rooms and hot showers in the OMT building. **As this is a school you must not get changed at your car for safeguarding reasons.**

To arrive at the water

The entrance to the lake area will be signposted from the car park. Follow the path next to the large flag. Please be patient when registering, especially at the start of sessions.

Registration

At registration you will be asked for your name to confirm your booking before entering the water, no ID is required.

You will also be asked for your car registration number (or description of your bike) which acts as an additional safety check for missing swimmers.

Dogs

Dogs are not encouraged on the site. Any dogs who do attend, must be kept on a lead at all times and cleared up after.

Loyalty Scheme

We have a loyalty point scheme in operation. Your account at ATWevents.co.uk will accumulate points which can be used to pay for future sessions or events.

Kitdrop area

At lakeside there is a marquee for you to leave a small bag and belongings under. While we would consider the area to be safe, please do not leave any valuables in your bag. We cannot accept any responsibility for lost items. Car keys can be left with the lakeside manager at registration, if required.

Non Swimmers

If you have a non-swimming, friend you are welcome to bring them to enjoy the lakeside experience. There is a pleasant spot on the boat ramp at the side of the lake to observe the swimmers and the natural wildlife while enjoying the peace of the lake.

Walking/Running

As this is a private venue, it is not possible to walk/run around the lake, the playing fields or the school. If you wish to walk/run – please exit via the main entrance. There is an extensive footpath network along the canals reaching around the Watford area.





Courteous Swimming

We are proud to welcome a diverse range of swimmers to our lake, from first-time open-water swimmers, to World Champion triathletes and GB squad swimmers. As a result, you may find swimmers travelling at very different speeds to you.

If you are a fast swimmer, please ensure that you sight regularly and give other swimmers a wide berth. All swimmers must wear brightly coloured swim hats (or use a high-viz tow float) to make you visible to both the safety team and also other swimmers.

Our famous 'Eat My Bubbles' swim hats are available to purchase at registration if you don't have one.

If you do accidentally bump in to another swimmer (we've all done it!), please acknowledge the accident and take a line to the next buoy that will move you apart (anyone found to be swimming over other athletes will be reprimanded and if repeated will be banned....it is not acceptable behaviour).

If you enjoy a relaxing swim in the lake, please take a wide line around the buoys, leaving the inside line for the faster swimmers.

If you are waiting for other swimmers to catch up, do not hang around the swim buoys, this can result in dangerous collisions.

It's a big lake, with lots of room, please ensure that everyone enjoys a pleasant swimming experience.

Emergency Evacuation

In the unlikely event of an emergency (eg risk of lightning or a serious injury to a swimmer), our lake team will call for an evacuation of the lake. This will take the form of a loud horn being sounded repeatedly from the bank, and whistles being sounded by the water safety team. If you hear either of these please leave the water at the closest point (this may be the boat slipways halfway down the lake, rather than the normal exit area) and return to the kit reclaim area so we can sign you out of the water.

Swim Exit and Changing

Please exit the water at the astroturf entrance/exit and provide your name to the lake staff. If you exit the water at any other point around the lake, you must notify the lake staff so they can sign you out of the water, or they will be looking for you.

Retrieve your bag from the baggage area.

We now have access to the indoor changing rooms and showers in the OMT building next to the car park if you need to warm up.

Refreshments

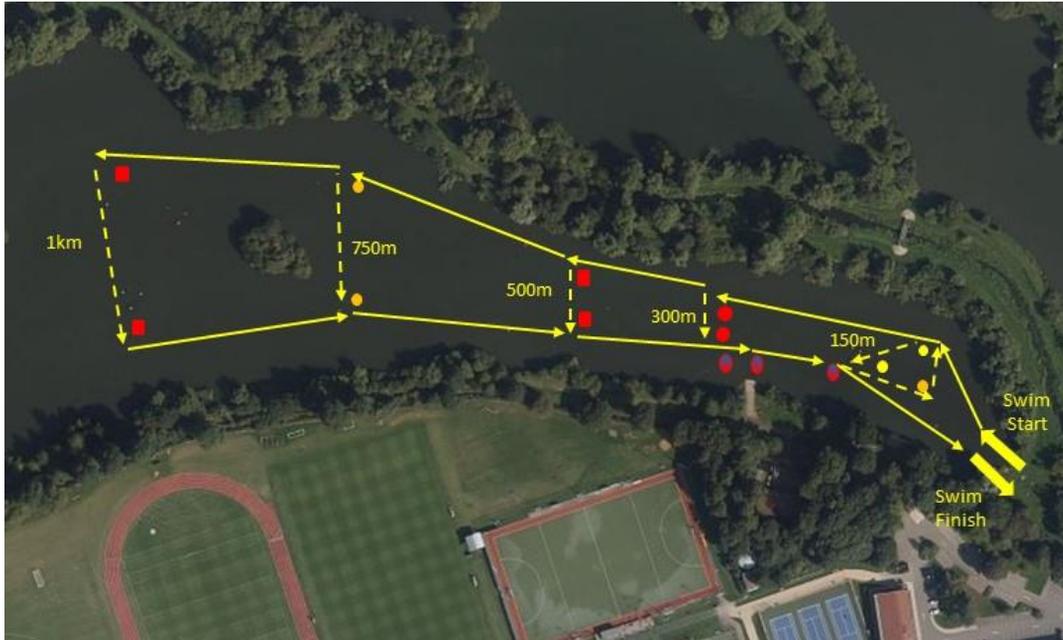
Coffee, tea, soft drinks and pastries are available from a barista at lakeside.

Post-swim

Dry off and warm up with layers as quickly as possible. Note the impact that cold water can have on driving capability(see page 6).



Lake Layout



The layout pictured above with loops ranging from 150m up to 1km will be setup, however the decision to open up the loops will be at the discretion of the safety team dependent upon the water temperature, weather conditions and demand. Your safety is our priority.

Water temperature

One final note, and probably the one that is most important to many, is the water temperature, we will be taking the temperature at the start of each session and displaying it clearly at registration.

This will be updated weekly on our Active Swim World social media pages.

The session will still take place if it's raining.

Partners

We are proud to partner with Zone3, a leading brand in outdoor swimming and triathlon gear offering everything you may need, from wetsuits to neoprene accessories to goggles and tow floats. Click on the link on the next page receive a 20% discount.

We look forward to welcoming you down at Merchant Taylors' Lake.

Swim well, swim happy and don't eat bubbles (if you do.... it probably means you're too close to someone!)



We would like to say a huge **THANK YOU** to our partners. Check out the websites below and use the discount codes to prepare yourself for the upcoming event:

ATW's SWIM Sponsor

[Zone 3 - 15% off here!](#)

(Discount will be automatically applied after clicking link.)



ATW's Supplement Sponsor

[Revive Active](#)

20% off with code ATW20



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Cold Water – Facts and Advice



Swimming in cold water should always be approached with care.

Swimming in cold water puts additional pressure on the cardio-vascular system.

• If you have any known medical conditions or a family history of cardio-vascular conditions **OR** if you have previously experienced difficulties after swimming in cold water refer to your GP before participating

When you are cold your thinking and mobility are impaired.

• Always check that you know where and how to exit before entering the water

When you first get into cold water you will experience the cold shock response – initial gasp, rapid breathing, increase heart rate and blood pressure. During this time it is difficult to coordinate swimming and breathing.

- Always acclimatise to the water temperature before attempting to swim.
- Keep your head above water as you acclimatise. NOTE: Wetsuits do not remove the cold shock response as they fill with water when you get in. The benefit kicks in when the layer of water trapped between the skin and the wetsuit warms up.
- You may experience excruciating “ice-cream head” pain when first putting your head in the water as the cold sensitive nerves in the face and palate go into shock.
- Going in to very cold water (typically less than 11°C) can cause numbness and pain, particularly in the extremities, such as the hands and feet. Neoprene socks and gloves can help protect your hands and feet.

As you get colder you can experience mental confusion, slurred speech and poor movement coordination.

- Never set time or distance goals for staying in the water. Get out if you are not comfortable.
- If you think begin to feel the above effects of mild hypothermia, one trick is to count to 10 and then back to one, over and over again. If you lose your train of thought or lose count, it is definitely time to exit the water and get help because you are slowly losing your mental capacity.
- Always follow the instructions of the safety team and get out if they ask you to – they have your best interests at heart. When you get out of the water you will continue to cool for approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

Re-warming takes time.

- Be prepared for re-warming: bring dry warm clothes including hat, gloves and thick socks.
- We will have a blanket and chair at lakeside reserved for those who are struggling to re-warm.
- Have a warm drink to help warm up your core temperature.
 - Re-warm gradually – don't worry if you shiver, shivering is good.
 - Don't jump into a hot shower or bath
 - **Do not attempt to drive or ride a bike until you have re-warmed.** In the event of an emergency, the water-safety team will assist you, call your emergency contact and alert the emergency services as required.

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