

# Lifeguards - how young is too young?

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Spring and summer are quickly approaching! It is that time of year when public entities will be looking to hire lifeguards. Although swimming pools and lakes provide a venue for the community to access and enjoy, if not properly staffed these venues and activities can carry safety risks. For many public entities it has become increasingly more difficult to find individuals to fill those positions which has brought up the question, can younger individuals be hired to fill the positions?

What is the lifeguard age requirement in the State of Washington? The simple answer is 15 to 16 years old. In order to become and work as a certified lifeguard, certification must be obtained from a qualified school. The age requirements to become a certified lifeguard vary across different lifeguard programs such as American Red Cross and United States Lifesaving Association. It also can vary based on whether the lifeguard is working at a swimming pool or open waters. To work at a swimming pool, lifeguards can be 15 years of age, but to work at open water, the lifeguard must be 16 years of age or older.

Lifeguard age requirements exist for several reasons. Being a lifeguard requires maturity, professionalism, and competence. It requires quick decision-making and problem-solving skills. It also requires great physical strength and endurance, which is very critical. It can be a matter of life and death which can lead to a very expensive claim and negative reputational impacts for the public entity to deal with for years to come.

What should the public entity do if dealing with a lifeguard shortage and cannot find enough qualified candidates to fill the positions? WCIA recommends closing the pool and beach. Make sure proper signage is posted that states "Beach/pool closed, no lifeguard on duty." We know you do not want to be the bummer in someone's summer, but not having a serious injury or fatality due to staffing shortages is important. For more information about Water Recreation Facilities see guideline [PAR.07 Recreational Water Facilities](#) in the WCIA Liability Resource Manual.

WCIA Risk Management Representatives are here to help. Please don't hesitate to reach out!