NWANA Safety Standards

Nordic Walking Association of North America (NWANA) · Official text as published at https://nwaofna.org/safety · Downloaded November 16, 2026

Safety Standards

The Nordic Walking Association of North America (NWANA, we, us, or our) is committed to promoting safe participation in Nordic Walking programs, events, challenges, competitions, training activities, and community initiatives. These Safety Standards apply to NWANA participants, athletes, license holders, instructors, coaches, officials, organizers, volunteers, teams, clubs, partners, parents, guardians, spectators, and any person involved in NWANA activities. Nordic Walking is an accessible activity, but it still involves movement, equipment, outdoor environments, weather, surfaces, traffic, fatigue, and other risks. Safety is a shared responsibility.

Effective Date: August 10, 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of these Safety Standards is to: reduce avoidable risks; support safe participation; guide organizers, instructors, coaches, officials, volunteers, and participants; promote responsible event and program planning; establish basic expectations for weather, equipment, routes, supervision, and emergency readiness; protect participants, youth, volunteers, spectators, and the public.

2. Shared Responsibility

Everyone involved in NWANA activities has a role in safety. Participants are responsible for participating within their ability, using appropriate equipment, following instructions, and stopping if they feel unsafe, injured, ill, or unwell. Instructors, coaches, organizers, officials, and volunteers are responsible for taking reasonable steps to create safe environments, communicate expectations, monitor conditions, and respond appropriately to concerns. Parents and guardians are responsible for helping youth participants understand rules, safety expectations, equipment needs, and appropriate conduct.

3. Participant Readiness

Participants should consider their health, physical readiness, experience, equipment, weather conditions, and course environment before participating. Participants should not begin or continue activity if they feel unsafe, dizzy, faint, ill, injured, unusually short of breath, confused, severely fatigued, or otherwise unable to participate safely. Participants with medical conditions, injuries, disabilities, pregnancy, recent illness, recent surgery, or long periods of inactivity should consult a qualified healthcare provider before participating. NWANA does not provide medical clearance, medical diagnosis, treatment, physical therapy, rehabilitation, or healthcare services.

4. Equipment Safety

Participants should use equipment that is appropriate for Nordic Walking and suitable for the activity, environment, and surface. This may include: properly sized Nordic Walking poles; secure straps or grips; appropriate tips or paws for the surface; comfortable walking or athletic footwear; weather-appropriate clothing; visibility items when needed; hydration or nutrition when appropriate; phone, ID, or emergency information when appropriate. Participants should inspect poles, straps, tips, shoes, and other equipment before activity. Damaged, unsafe, or inappropriate equipment should not be used.

5. Technique and Control

Participants should use technique appropriate to their ability and the activity format. Instructors and coaches should teach safe progression, basic technique, spacing, warm-up, cool-down, pacing, and control. Participants should avoid unsafe pole use, sudden stops, crowding, swinging poles near others, blocking paths, crossing poles dangerously, or moving faster than conditions allow. In group settings, participants should maintain appropriate spacing and be aware of people in front, behind, and beside them.

6. Route and Course Safety

Routes, courses, training areas, and event spaces should be selected with safety in mind. Organizers, instructors, coaches, and volunteers should consider: surface condition; traffic exposure; intersections and crossings; visibility; lighting; hills, turns, narrow areas, stairs, curbs, roots, gravel, ice, mud, or uneven surfaces; emergency access; rest areas; hydration access; start and finish flow; spectator areas; accessibility needs; weather exposure. Routes should be appropriate for the activity level, participant group, and event format.

7. Weather and Environmental Conditions

Weather and environmental conditions must be considered before and during activity. Risks may include: heat; cold; rain; snow; ice; lightning; high winds; poor air quality; smoke; humidity; low visibility; extreme sun exposure. NWANA activities may be modified, delayed, shortened, relocated, converted, postponed, or canceled when conditions create unacceptable risk. Participants should dress appropriately, hydrate, use sun protection when needed, and stop activity if weather or environmental conditions become unsafe.

8. Heat Safety

In hot conditions, organizers, instructors, coaches, volunteers, and participants should consider: hydration; shade; route length; pace; start time; participant age and condition; signs of heat exhaustion or heat illness; access to cooling or assistance. Participants should slow down or stop if they experience dizziness, confusion, nausea, chills, weakness, headache, cramps, or unusual fatigue.

9. Cold, Ice, and Low-Visibility Safety

In cold, icy, snowy, or low-visibility conditions, organizers and participants should consider: traction; appropriate footwear; pole tips suitable for the surface; reflective or visible clothing; shorter routes; daylight timing; wind chill; frostbite or hypothermia risks; safe transportation to and from activity. Activity should be modified or canceled if the surface or conditions are unsafe.

10. Traffic and Public Spaces

When NWANA activities take place on sidewalks, paths, trails, parks, roads, or shared public spaces, participants must respect public rules and other users. Participants should: obey traffic laws and crossing signals; use sidewalks, paths, or designated routes when available; stay alert around vehicles, cyclists, runners, pedestrians, animals, and other users; avoid blocking paths; pass safely; keep poles under control; follow organizer or volunteer instructions. Activities should not create unnecessary risk to participants or the public.

11. Group Activities

For group walks, training sessions, clinics, programs, or events, leaders should communicate: route or course information; expected pace; start and finish location; safety rules; emergency contact process; what to do if separated from the group; weather or equipment expectations; participant responsibilities. Groups should be managed in a way that supports safe spacing, appropriate pace, and awareness of participant ability.

12. Youth Safety

Activities involving youth participants should include appropriate supervision based on age, activity type, location, group size, and risk level. Parents, guardians, instructors, coaches, volunteers, and organizers should ensure that youth participants understand basic safety rules, route expectations, equipment use, and communication procedures. Youth participants should not be left unsupervised in situations where supervision is reasonably required. NWANA Safe Sport standards also apply to youth activities.

13. Emergency Readiness

Organizers, instructors, coaches, officials, and volunteers should consider emergency readiness before activities. Depending on the activity, this may include: emergency contact information; access to phone or communication device; first aid supplies; knowledge of route access points; emergency vehicle access; weather monitoring; incident reporting process; designated meeting point; volunteer or staff roles; plan for lost or separated participants. For larger events, additional emergency planning may be required.

14. Incidents, Injuries, and Reporting

Safety incidents, injuries, near misses, unsafe conditions, participant protection concerns, or serious conduct issues should be reported to NWANA or the appropriate event organizer. Reports should include: date and time; location; event or program name; names of individuals involved; description of what happened; witnesses, if any; action taken; photos, screenshots, or documents if available. For emergencies, call emergency services first.

15. Medical Support

NWANA activities may vary in size and risk level. Not all activities will have on-site medical personnel. Participants are responsible for their own health and should carry necessary medication, emergency information, and personal medical supplies when appropriate. Organizers should communicate whether medical support, first aid, hydration, or emergency services are available for a specific event.

16. Accessibility and Adaptation

NWANA supports inclusive participation where reasonable and safe. Participants with disabilities, mobility limitations, health concerns, or adaptation needs should contact NWANA or the event organizer before participating when accommodations or route information may be needed. NWANA may modify activities, routes, pace, format, or participation expectations when reasonable and appropriate, but not all activities or locations may be suitable for every participant.

17. Instructor, Coach, Official, and Organizer Responsibility

Individuals in leadership roles have additional responsibility to support safety. They should: act within the scope of their role, license, certification, and training; communicate safety expectations; monitor conditions; adapt activity when needed; avoid pushing participants beyond safe limits; respect participant concerns;

report serious incidents; follow NWANA policies and event procedures; maintain appropriate boundaries and conduct.

18. Event Modification or Cancellation

NWANA or event organizers may modify, delay, shorten, relocate, convert, postpone, or cancel an activity due to safety concerns. Reasons may include: severe weather; unsafe route or course conditions; public safety issues; emergency conditions; low visibility; heat or cold risk; poor air quality; venue issues; staffing or volunteer limitations; medical or operational concerns; public authority direction. Safety decisions may be made before or during an activity.

19. No Guarantee of Safety

NWANA works to promote safe participation, but no activity can be made risk-free. By participating in NWANA activities, individuals understand that risks may remain even when reasonable safety measures are used. Participants are responsible for making personal decisions about whether to participate, continue, slow down, stop, or seek assistance.

20. Policy Updates

NWANA may update these Safety Standards from time to time. Updates will be posted on this page with a revised effective date. Continued participation in NWANA activities after updates are posted means you acknowledge the updated Safety Standards.

21. Contact NWANA

For safety questions, concerns, or incident reporting, contact NWANA: Email: info@nwaofna.org. Subject line: Safety Concern