



Parent Handbook

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Welcome to Team Vortex!

Team Vortex is a year-round competitive swim team based in Fort Collins, Colorado, offering high-quality professional coaching and technique instruction for all ages. Our mission is to engage swimmers in a competitive program by teaching proper technique and encouraging skill development in a supportive team environment. We are a non-profit organization run by a volunteer Board of Directors, who are all swim parents just like you! This document is intended to serve as a reference document for all families, so please keep it in a place where you can refer to it as questions arise.

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Team Vortex Operations

Vortex is a non-profit organization run by a group of volunteer Board of Directors who are all interested swim parents, value the club, and want to be a part of shaping its present and future. The volunteer Board oversees all financial and legal operations of the non-profit organization including payment for the coaching staff, payment to facilities from which we rent water time for practice, and all official responsibilities and obligations as a USA Swimming affiliate club. The Board meets 1x/month but club operations happen on an ongoing basis. Want to learn more? Interested in potentially serving on the Board at some point down the road? Seek out one of the Board members at a practice or a swim meet or send them an email! The list of current board members for the 2025–2026 year is on our website: <https://www.teamvortex.org/about-us>

Parental responsibilities and involvement

We ask that parents and guardians:

1. Make every effort to have your swimmer at practice on time.
2. Encourage good diet and sleeping habits, as they are critical to development and success as a swimmer (and a person).
3. Help your swimmer decide which events to swim at meets by familiarizing yourself with their strengths and their goals.
4. Support your swimmer as a parent but let the coaches coach.
5. Assist with fundraising efforts, social events, and volunteer when asked.
6. Familiarize yourself with how the club is run and reach out to the right people with questions or concerns. For anything swimming related, the “wet side,” contact your swimmer’s Lead Coach. If more follow-up is needed, contact the Head Coach (coachnick@teamvortex.org). Only in instances of unresolved issues that require additional discussion, should the Team Vortex Board of Directors be involved. For anything “dry side” please first contact Cheryl, the team manager (teammanager@teamvortex.org), with the exception of volunteer-related topics, which should go to the volunteer coordinator (volunteercoordinator@teamvortex.org).

Team Vortex and USA Swimming Meet Calendar

The short course (SC) season starts in September and begins a new swim year for Team Vortex. The short course reflects competitions in a 25-yard pool; this is the typical length for most pools in neighborhoods or within fitness facilities. The short course season lasts through March. Then, the USA Swimming calendar switches to a long course (LC) format, from April through July. LC meets are competitions in a 50-meter pool. These are the longer format pools you may see at the Olympics or other national or international competitions.

Team Vortex practices and competes year-round, through both short course and long course seasons. Meet participation is either strongly encouraged (developmental groups) or required (competitive groups). Swim meets are important to the development of swimmers—they provide a different energy than practice and enable kids to see what they are capable of as they strive to reach their individual goals. Reach out to your coaches with questions!

Practice expectations

Coaches keep track of attendance, as it helps them understand frequency of coach/swimmer contact and performance improvement. If a swimmer comes to half of the practices, they receive half the coaching as compared to kids who attend all practices. Certain skills are worked on specific days as part of a designed year-long swim curriculum.

Team Vortex typically practices out of three Fort Collins pools—Mulberry, EPIC, and Raintree Athletic Club. Your swimmer was assigned to a swim group; groups reflect a pipeline of ability, commitment, maturity, attitude, and age. Your swim group will have assigned practice times and locations. These locations or times are subject to change based on availability of water space, but for the most part, remain constant throughout the year. Any changes will be updated on the team calendar online and are usually emailed by coaches.

For questions on expectations for each practice group and questions about moving to the next level, please see additional information on the Vortex website and talk to your group coach to learn more.

All swimmers regardless of group will do dryland training prior to getting into the pool. Therefore, swimmers need to wear proper closed-toe shoes—flip flops, Crocs, and winter boots are not appropriate shoes for dryland training.

Please note that Vortex pays for use of the pools and importantly, utilization of Raintree for Vortex practice does not allow for unsupervised or non-member access to Raintree! Please pay attention to guidance provided by coaches on entry and exit procedures for Raintree. Locker rooms cannot be used by Vortex swimmers, even if your family are members of Raintree Athletic Club. If you are a Raintree member, you need to walk back to the lobby with the team and check in as you normally would to gain access to the club. Please ensure we continue to have access to Raintree Athletic Club by respecting their patrons—do not park in handicapped parking and do not block the fire lane.

As per USA Swimming regulations, parents/guardians are not allowed on the pool deck during practice. At Mulberry and EPIC there is seating above the pool area. At Raintree, this is not the case. Swimmers then proceed directly to the pool, entering through the pool main entrance off of the gym next to the family locker room. Parents/guardians may escort their younger swimmers to the pool if needed but cannot sit and wait in the pool area during practice. When the practice is over, a coach will walk the group to the front of the club, where they can be reunited with their family. Please do not drop off your swimmer more than 10 minutes prior to the start of practice and promptly pick them up following the end of practice. Please be respectful of the coaches, their time, and cognizant of regulations of USA Swimming and the pools in which we practice.

Injuries and illness

- Please keep your swimmer home from practice if they have a fever or are otherwise not well enough to physically handle their regular practice routine.
- Whenever possible, the group coach should be informed of an illness or injury, even if minor.
- In the case of injury that will affect longer term practice attendance or participation, please not only notify your group coach, but also provide associated medical information. This information will be shared among the coaching staff, including modifications required.

- When your swimmer returns, a modified workout will be created to ease the transition back to their practice routine.
- Parents and medical staff might be asked to sign a medical release form when the swimmer recovers or if the swimmer will continue swimming in a modified manner despite the injury.
- Communication is key!

Equipment and team gear

With your registration, you receive a Vortex t-shirt and a Vortex swim cap. Other gear and equipment needed are:

1. An appropriately sized swimsuit
 - a. If unsure of what size to purchase, visit MI Sports in North Loveland (3400 N Garfield, Loveland), as employees there can assist with appropriate sizing.
 - b. A Vortex team suit for meets is strongly encouraged. These black and green suits can be purchased from MI Sports or SwimOutlet. Speedo Aquablade is more appropriate for older, more committed swimmers and Speedo endurance is best for younger swimmers.
 - c. Vortex logo can be applied to these team suits but is optional.
2. Gear as required for your swim group, see: <https://www.teamvortex.org/groups>
 - a. Minimum:
 - i. Goggles
 - ii. Kickboard
 - iii. Fins (Speedo Switchblade)
 - b. Other required depending on group:
 - i. Pull buoy
 - ii. Swimmers' snorkel
 - iii. Paddles (Stroke Maker or Finis)
 - iv. Power Bags (Elite and Peak only)
3. Suits and gear can be purchased at MI Sports in North Loveland and/or our team store on SwimOutlet!
 - a. Lots of other optional gear can be purchased in either location, including swim parkas, hoodies, sweats, etc!
 - b. At MI Sports be sure to mention that you are part of Team Vortex!
4. Other time-limited Vortex gear may be offered from time to time; those opportunities will be directly emailed to the membership.
5. Replacement Vortex silicone caps can be purchased from the team. At time of writing these are billed at \$15 but subject to change with changing costs—email teamgear@teamvortex.org to request a replacement. Your account will be directly billed.

Taking a break?

Swimmers may take a break from the team and dues will not be required during the break as long as the family notifies Vortex by the **25th** of the preceding month to suspend next month's registration. Email: teammanager@teamvortex.org

Your account balance is due in full when you leave the team.

Vortex is unable to “hold” spots for swimmers. This includes the beginning of each season, in September. The only way to guarantee a spot is to register and pay the monthly dues. Swimmers wishing to join at a later date will be allowed to join based on applicable group capacity. When taking a break or leaving the team there is no guarantee a spot will be available on return.

Commit Swimming – your online home for all things Vortex

In the summer of 2024, Team Vortex made the switch from the TeamUnify platform to a new platform called Commit Swimming. This platform is a huge improvement for practice planning and tracking for coaches. On our website (www.teamvortex.org), once you log in, it is your personalized Commit swimming space. This is where you can see your invoices, set or change your payment method, where the event calendar is located, where you sign up for meets, and most volunteer opportunities. When logged in, go to “swimmer”, then “manage” to add additional parent emails. Then, each person should be able to create their own login and therefore be able to separately receive email communication, check billing status, and register for “jobs” such that it is linked under your family account.

Fees and Billing

Fees

Vortex Swim Club membership consists of both one-time fees per swim year and monthly dues. Swim meets are an additional cost as are equipment and team swimsuits. Here’s the breakdown of costs and fees:

Cost	Amount	Frequency	Notes
Administrative fee	\$165 +\$50 for each additional swimmer per family	1x per swim year, upon registration (September-July)	
Volunteer Deposit	\$250	1x per swim year, upon registration	Refunded if/when family reaches 10 service hours in support of team operations or meet participation. See volunteer policy section.
USA Swimming registration	~\$80/year; flex membership allowed for younger swimmers at ~\$30/year	1x calendar year	You must have a USA Swimming registration to be part of Team Vortex
Equipment	Varies based on swim group	As needed	Families are responsible for ensuring their swimmers always have functioning equipment and gear as required by their group. See equipment and gear section for more information.
Monthly dues	Varies from \$110/mo (Lightning Swim	Monthly	Additional swimmers per family are 10% off.

	Group) to \$210/mo (Peak Swim Group)		
Swim meets	\$6.00 per swimmer per meet + a per-event fee that varies by meet	Per meet	These fees vary by meet and can add up quickly! It is your responsibility to read the meet information associated with that event in the platform and understand the meet fees when signing up for swim meets. Swim meet fees are NOT refundable after the meet deadline regardless of the reason a swimmer does not attend the meet. NOTE: Vortex always pays for your swim meet fees and then bills your account.

Billing

The team bills electronically at the beginning of the month for that month. **Families are responsible for payment of dues if their swimmer is registered for the month regardless of whether the swimmer attends practice or not.** One-time administrative fee and the volunteer deposit are all billed during the first month of membership per swim year, so please plan accordingly. Billing can occur via ACH or via credit card and you need to set up a payment method within your account. You can edit your payment method and preview your upcoming invoice in the “payments” section of your account. New this year, all processing fees are being passed onto families.

If the account balance is not paid in full by 6:00pm the 7th of the month, a late fee of \$15 will be charged. Any ACH transaction that is pending at this time will not incur the late fee. Automatic payments that fail to process may be charged a \$15.00 fee.

If dues are **30 days delinquent**, the family's swimmer(s) will no longer be permitted to participate in any aspect of the program.

Prorated Monthly Dues

Team Vortex Swim Club DOES NOT prorate partial month swimming except for these two circumstances:

1. the first month a new swimmer joins the team
2. swimmers leaving for summer clubs in mid-May

Scholarship Program

We offer a scholarship discount on monthly dues for up to 2 swimmers per practice group. Applicants must qualify for free and reduced meals through the school district and must commit to the scholarship agreement. Please email teammanager@teamvortex.org for more information and the scholarship application.

Volunteer Policy and Deposit

Unlike many sports or other extracurriculars in which your kids may participate, swimming relies on volunteers to support all competition. Team Vortex requests **10 hours** of commitment **per family** (not per swimmer) per swim year. This commitment is needed to 1) ensure we can meet our requirements to support running of swim meets in northern Colorado through various roles, including but limited to providing timers, and 2) share the responsibility of providing a supportive team environment with robust administrative support for our swim club. We charge a volunteer deposit of \$250 for 10 hours of volunteer support; the deposit will appear on your first monthly bill per swim year.

How can I earn volunteer hours?

There are ample opportunities during the course of the year to earn hours and ultimately have your volunteer deposit refunded to your account. These are the most common ways to earn volunteer hours:

1. Volunteering to support meets. We are often required to provide a certain number of timers for swim meets in which we participate. These are often last minute requests and will be sent via email but with sign up required in the “Jobs” section of your account. Timing is very easy, and you shouldn’t be intimidated if you’ve never done it before. Please do not assume you can achieve 10 hours of volunteer service solely through volunteering at meets.
2. Supporting regular team functions. The Board Members are all Vortex parents, and Board Members invest well beyond 10 hours a year, to run, support, and improve the club. Aside from Board Members, there are some other regular/recurring roles that over the course of the swim year contribute 10 hours of service. These include:
 - Social events coordinator for younger groups/high school groups
 - Swim-a-thon and team dinner coordination and set-up/clean up
3. Becoming a USA Swimming Official—We really need to identify parents who anticipate being around swimming for a while and are willing to go through the training to become an official and then perform the minimum number of officiating sessions per year to retain certification. The team will cover all costs associated with becoming an official.
4. Identifying corporate sponsors (see Sponsorship section) or bringing in substantial funds through other fundraising efforts
5. Identifying skills or connections you may bring to the club that could improve the team.

Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator at volunteercoordinator@teamvortex.org with any questions or concerns

How do I learn about volunteer opportunities?

Volunteer opportunities will be announced via email. Timing needs for meets are usually released a day or two before the meet starts. The volunteer coordinator will create a “job” within our platform and you’ll toggle to an open spot and “sign up.”

How are volunteer hours tracked?

Anything with a “job sign-up” in our website will be tracked automatically in the back-end of our Commit Swimming platform. If certain volunteer roles end up being more hours than what the Volunteer

Coordinator estimated, please reach out to discuss the additional time served. For other volunteer roles, the tracking is more informal, but should be tracked. Please reach out to the Volunteer Coordinator with questions, or to ensure that your time is being accounted for correctly.

What happens when I think I earned our 10 hours?

The Volunteer Coordinator tracks membership volunteer hours and when families hit the 10-hour minimum, the team manager is notified, and the credit will be placed on that family's account. If you think you've reached the hours and don't see it on your account the following month, please reach out to volunteercoordinator@teamvortex.org to verify. It is your responsibility to ensure you notice the credit appears on your account.

Does reaching 10 hours mean I'm off the hook to volunteer more?

Volunteering when there is a need is an expectation of all Vortex families. The volunteer deposit is a means to increase family participation/engagement in the operations of the club and swim meets. Even though you have reached 10 hours, needs still arise and you may be asked to step up and fill in. In years past, timing assignments for meets were assigned, and families had to go time at meets, even meets in which their kids weren't swimming. We don't want to have to resort to assigning meet support, so please ensure that job sign-ups are filled no matter what.

Our volunteer deposit and associated hourly requirement is substantially less than other area swim teams. With your shared support and willingness to help, we can keep it that way!

Is the volunteer deposit prorated if we only swim for half of the year?

Vortex is a year-round swim club. The volunteer deposit and the 10 hour minimum for crediting are not prorated. If you choose to swim for less than the full year, you accept the reality that you will have fewer opportunities to earn your volunteer deposit back.

USA Swimming registration

As a USA Swimming affiliate club, a USA Swimming registration number is **required** for all swimmers irrespective of age or swim group. This is not only required to participate in meets, but is required for practice, as this also provides insurance coverage for the swimmers. USA Swimming registration is valid for 1 year and occurs on a calendar year basis. Families must register their own children, and this must occur for them to be allowed in the pool to practice. They will be turned away if a valid registration isn't in hand. So, shortly after registration for Team Vortex, ensure you register with USA Swimming ASAP. For returning swimmers, renewal needs to occur before the start of practice in the new calendar year in January.

Safe Sport

USA Swimming is committed to providing a healthy and positive environment for all its members. USA Swimming's Safe Sport program employs a multi-layered approach to keep kids safe, including background checks and employment screening; training and education; monitoring, supervision and mandatory reporting. These measures are informed by experts in the field of child safety and are among the strongest safeguards found in youth-serving organizations.

Vortex requires all of our coaches and Board Members to take the Athlete Protection Training each year. As an organization, our priority is to be Safe Sport certified—a sign that we as an organization take protection of our kids very seriously. To achieve certification, it's not just about the coaches and Board members taking training, we need parents and all swimmers over the age of 13 to take the appropriate training. These trainings are online, short, and linked to your USA Swimming account. When in your USA Swimming account (not Vortex account!), toggle to the Education tab, then Course Catalog. For parents, it's the "Parents Guide to Misconduct in Sport" and for 13-17 year olds, the "Safe Sport for Youth Athletes (ages 13-17)." All swimmers must take the Athlete Protection Training when they turn 18 years old.

Fundraising

Team Vortex is a non-profit organization. Outgoing expenses are primarily payroll for coaches and the team manager, as well as the renting of lanes for practice at all three pools. Additional outgoing expenses include equipment, t-shirts, software, and coach costs for reimbursement for expenses related to all meets. Team Vortex income is 1) administrative fees, 2) monthly dues, and 3) fundraising.

Swim-a-thon

Our largest fundraising effort each year is Swim-a-thon. This is a direct donation program organized by USA Swimming. We encourage swimmers to obtain general donations or donations for each lap swam during our culminating Swim-a-thon event, typically with donations over a month or so in the fall and the culminating event on a Saturday morning. It's a day filled with family, fun, food, and prizes!

Sponsorship Program

Team Vortex has a corporate sponsorship program. Vortex will use the funds not only to offset club expenses but will designate up to 50% of this funding for needs-based scholarships. Team Vortex strives to ensure swimming is as inclusive as possible, allowing for the benefits to swimming to reach all members of the community. If you identify a new corporate sponsor, the volunteer deposit will be reimbursed. For more information, please email: sponsorship@teamvortex.org.

Grocery store cards

Vortex participates in community rewards programs at King Soopers. For more information see <https://www.teamvortex.org/fundraising>

Swim Meets

As a competitive swim team, participation in meets is strongly encouraged for all levels of swimmers. Understanding how to sign up for meets and what to consider and how to plan for the day of a meet can relieve a lot of uncertainty for new swim families.

Team Vortex participates in approximately one meet per month, sometimes more. These meets are primarily in northern Colorado, including north Denver. The Vortex calendar is up to date regarding meets that we as a team will participate in at least several months in advance. The Head Coach selects the meets among those available based on a wide variety of thoughtful criteria about timing and appropriateness for various age groups and level of competition.

Swim meet sign-up

Do

- Pay attention to email and the Commit Swimming platform to learn when sign-up for a particular meet is open
- Understand the meet sign-up process
- Understand what reasonable and unreasonable events for your child may be
- Read the meet announcement pdf from the hosting team that is loaded onto the website for that event. In that document you will learn what events will occur on what day, if your child's age group will be swimming in the morning or afternoon, how many events each swimmer is limited to per day and overall, and meet and event-specific costs
- Come prepared at the time the coaches ask swimmers to be there! Bring snacks, water, and a towel.
- Have fun, learn, and grow from the experience and cheer on your Vortex teammates!
- Let the coaches know if you are sick and can't attend!

Don't

- Pay the meet directly—Vortex handles this and bills you!
- Disagree with coaches if they don't think your swimmer is yet ready to compete in a certain event—they know best!
- Ask for a refund if your kid is sick or you decide you have other plans that weekend
- Leave a meet without ensuring swimmers talk to coaches

Additional info:

Coaches will send out information via email when a meet is open for sign-up and will indicate the date of the Vortex registration closing. This will be earlier than the overall deadline for registration for the meet, because our coaches register the entire team together and pay for the entirety of the Vortex team costs upon registration. Within that calendar event on your Commit Swimming account, you will find the meet announcement put out by the hosting team. This document contains a multitude of information, including what days and which events will occur on each day. This document will also clearly state the cost per event for the swim meet, so please take note. The maximum number of events per swimmer per day and overall will also be stated therein.

Most swim meets have events on three straight days. The events on Friday are typically the distance events and depending on the format of the meet, all ages may swim in the morning sessions the other two days or they may be segmented into different sessions based on age group.

During our open registration period for each meet, each family must indicate within their account which events their child would like to swim in that given meet. Events are organized by gender and age group (8 and under, 9-10 years, 11-12 years, 13-14 years, and 15 years and above). If you are a new swimmer, please discuss with your coach what you should register your child for before doing so. However, there are specific swimming regulations for each stroke, and some strokes (breaststroke and butterfly) have more specific regulations. If your child does not routinely swim those strokes in a manner that is legal during practice, the coaches will not approve their participation in that event during a formal competition, as they will invariably be disqualified by USA Swimming officials. Although disqualification

happens, even to experienced swimmers from time to time, setting a child up without hope for swimming a legal stroke in a competition isn't fair to anyone.

Swimmers 8 years and under can swim 25-yard events (1 length of the pool for short course season); however, all swimmers 9 years and over have a minimum distance of 50 yards for any event. Coaches manually approve all of the event requests prior to submitting the Vortex registration for the meet, and they will suggest alternative events if needed.

Swim meet costs and billing

You do not need to do anything differently or separately to pay for swim meet entries—just sign up. Meet fees will be calculated per swimmer and billed along with monthly dues. Depending on timing, it's possible that meet fees will be billed BEFORE the meet. Please plan accordingly. **After registration for the meet has closed, payment will not be refunded under any circumstances, no matter the reason for lack of attendance.** These costs are not ours to refund—they are the hosting team and USA Swimming costs. Please pay attention to meet fees as they can add up quickly.

Types of swim meets

Pentathlon

When swimmers compete in one event of each stroke plus an Individual Medley (I.M.). Awards are usually based on the lowest combined time-total of all 5 events in the swimmer's gender and age bracket.

Silver Circuit

These are beginner swim meets! These meets have a maximum time standard to enter the event. Your fastest time must be slower than the time standard. These meets usually offer a low-key environment to facilitate new swimmers transition into USA Swimming sanctioned events without long timelines and in a good starting format.

District Championships

The Northern Colorado Conference/League championship meet to crown a league championship club. All Team Vortex swimmers should attend Northern Colorado District meets, held twice a year at the end of the Short Course (winter) and Long Course (summer) seasons.

State Championships

At the end of Short Course (winter) and Long Course (summer) season, State Championship meets are sanctioned by Colorado Swimming Inc., the governing body of swimming in the state of Colorado. Colorado Swimming Inc. sets the qualifying time standards for these state meets.

Zones, Sectionals, Futures, Junior Nationals, Senior Nationals and Olympic Trials

These are championship meets that require qualifying standards to be met. They are a series of national level stepping-stone meets to progress competitively at the highest levels depending upon age and region. These are the culminating meets for swimmer development and should be a part of all swimmers' long-term goals and aspirations. To learn more, talk to your coach!