



## Are You Ready for Your Mass Start Triathlon Swim?

I have hesitated on writing this article because my first reaction to this question is “sure, go for it”. The reality is that mass start open water swims can be a little dangerous. We need to be realistic with ourselves about our abilities.

Let me clarify what I consider a mass start: races like the IM where every category starts at one time and the race has over 200 people.

You can spend your entire triathlon career and never do a mass start triathlon. Personally, I do not enjoy getting kicked and punched and do not feel that it is necessary to race like this to be a “triathlete”. We now have timing chips and can have staggered or waves starts and avoid much of this frustration. That being said, some of the premier races around the world use mass starts and we need to realize the risk and manage them as best as possible.

So let’s be real...if you are nervous about open water swimming, have trouble controlling your breathing during a race, or generally are not comfortable with the idea of someone swimming over you and your ability to recover from that, then maybe a mass start race is something you should save for a later date.

No matter what type of start you have at a triathlon you can expect an adrenalin rush when the gun fires. You will need to be able to handle this rush without looking for the lifeguard. Find a place that allows swimming and practice your race start. WARM UP as usual, then create the mental image of the gun firing and swim really hard for 200 meters; then settle in to your normal race pace. Pick a day with conditions that your fear: waves, winds, murky water, etc. You might as well face the fears during training and not during a race with 500 of your closest friends.

Once you do decide you are ready to do a race with a mass swim, make sure you GET IN THE WATER BEFORE THE START!! There will always be a slight shock to your body when you enter the water, your nerves will be in overdrive and you will need a warm-up. These are all things you need to have settled down before the gun goes off and you are swimming full speed.

Being realistic with yourself about your ability to handle a mass start swim might delay your IM or other type of an event for a year or so. If you enter a few local races and become a more capable swimmer, I believe you stand a better chance of enjoying the overall experience.