



Reducing child drowning in London

A summary that describes key facts about child drowning and how to prevent or reduce it

June 2018

Why it matters

- drowning can follow planned or unplanned activity in, on or around water
- drowning can happen in as little as one inch of water and is usually silent and quick – children may not splash or scream and can drown within a few minutes
- for every child that drowns, many more receive emergency care for non fatal submersion injuries
- although the numbers of children who drown are very low in London, many drowning deaths are preventable
- 37 children aged under 19 years drowned from 2007-2016 in London, about four children on average each year

Risk factors

Factors that increase the risk of child drowning include:

Individual

- age (under fives and teenagers)
- sex (boys)
- inability to swim
- medical condition eg epilepsy
- risk taking behaviour eg alcohol use

Caregivers

- lack of supervision
- not being able to recognise that a child is in danger
- lack of awareness about water safety
- lack of knowledge of resuscitation

Environment

- absence of a safety barrier
- lack of safety equipment
- hot weather
- water temperature eg water that is colder than expected

Impact

The impact of child drowning is significant and includes:

- effects on the emotional health and wellbeing of families and friends
- lost potential for the individual, their family and the whole of society
- the consequences can be devastating for children who do survive eg severe, permanent neurological disability
- the economic costs of search and rescue
- the cost of child drowning in London is estimated to be about £800,000 to £1.1 million each year. This does not include the cost of non fatal drowning

Actions to prevent

Actions to prevent child drowning include:

- teach children to swim and water safety skills – this is a compulsory part of the national curriculum for primary schools
- educate parents about active supervision (eg keep children within arms reach and avoid distractions) and designate a water watcher
- make sure the right safety gear (eg life jacket) is always used
- install barriers to control access to water and ensure safe swimming environments
- increase public awareness and highlight the vulnerability of children and of not drinking and swimming
- train bystanders in safe rescue ('reach or throw but don't go') and resuscitation
- provide guidance on safe swimming for people with epilepsy



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DROWNING IS SILENT AND QUICK

Children may not splash or scream when they drown and can drown within a few minutes

From 2007-16 in children aged 0 to 19 years in London



37
drowned



80%
were boys



<1 year



1 to 4 years



5 to 9 years



10 to 19 years

£800k - £1.1m

estimated annual cost of child drowning in London

ACTIONS TO PREVENT DROWNING



Teach children to **swim** and **water safety** skills



Don't drink and swim



Actively **supervise** children around water



Train people in **safe rescue** and **resuscitation**



Always use the right **safety gear**



Provide **guidance** on safe swimming for people with epilepsy



Install **barriers** controlling access to water



Increase **public awareness** of drowning

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References

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- CDC (2016) Unintentional Drowning: Get the Facts <https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/water-safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html>
- Public Health Wales NHS Trust (2016) Thematic review of deaths of children and young people through drowning [http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/ChildDeathReviewDocs.nsf/3653c00e7bb6259d80256f27004900db/55d3aec28e5450e680257f620037f335/\\$FILE/CDR%20report_English.pdf](http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/ChildDeathReviewDocs.nsf/3653c00e7bb6259d80256f27004900db/55d3aec28e5450e680257f620037f335/$FILE/CDR%20report_English.pdf)
- Safe Kids Worldwide (2016) Keeping kids safe in and around water https://www.safekids.org/sites/default/files/small_water_safety_study_2016.pdf
- Data source: London Knowledge and Intelligence Analysis of ONS data

Risk factors

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- Public Health Wales NHS Trust (2016) Thematic review of deaths of children and young people through drowning [http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/ChildDeathReviewDocs.nsf/3653c00e7bb6259d80256f27004900db/55d3aec28e5450e680257f620037f335/\\$FILE/CDR%20report_English.pdf](http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/ChildDeathReviewDocs.nsf/3653c00e7bb6259d80256f27004900db/55d3aec28e5450e680257f620037f335/$FILE/CDR%20report_English.pdf)
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Impact

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Actions to prevent

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