

International Open Water Drowning Prevention Guidelines

CONSENSUS-BASED INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES TO PREVENT OPEN WATER DROWNING

DEVELOPED BY AN INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE

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BACKGROUND

Drowning is a major cause of injury death for all ages. According to the WHO Global Burden of Disease estimates, 388,000 people died in 2004 as a result of drowning around the world, of whom 45% were under the age of 20 years.¹ Global data show that approximately 28% of all unintentional injury deaths among children are due to drowning.² Many organizations world wide have attempted to address the risk of drowning associated with aquatic recreation by promoting a diverse plethora of drowning prevention messages. This diversity reflects the multifaceted nature of the drowning problem and the lack of evidence base. However, concise and consistent guidelines are needed to prevent confusion and promote message retention.

PURPOSE

Our goal was to establish simple drowning prevention guidelines targeted to parents, other caregivers and individuals for non-boating related recreation around open water. With an additional goal of having these guidelines be useful in open water settings around the world, we sought consensus from an international task force.

FINDINGS

The Task Force agreed on 16 key guidelines that address open water drowning prevention.

Open Water Guidelines: <i>Keep Yourself Safe</i>	
1.	Learn swimming and water safety survival skills.
2.	Always swim with others.
3.	Obey all safety signs and warning flags.
4.	Never go in the water after drinking alcohol.
5.	Know how and when to use a life jacket.
6.	Swim in areas with lifeguards.
7.	Know the weather and water conditions before getting in the water.
8.	Always enter shallow and unknown water feet first.

Open Water Guidelines: <i>Keep Others Safe</i>	
1.	Help and encourage others, especially children, to learn swimming and water safety survival skills.
2.	Swim in areas with lifeguards.
3.	Set water safety rules.
4.	Always provide close and constant attention to children you are supervising in or near water.
5.	Know how and when to use a life jacket, especially with children and weak swimmers.
6.	Learn first aid and CPR.
7.	Learn safe ways of rescuing others without putting yourself in danger.
8.	Obey all safety signs and warning flags.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that these guidelines will improve the clarity of communication between drowning prevention organizations and the public and be used widely with the ultimate goal of saving lives. Furthermore, it is hoped that prioritized guidelines will provide a focus for open water drowning prevention programs and serve as an agenda for open water drowning prevention research.

1. World Report on Child Injury Prevention, World Health Organization, 2008
2. Bierens, JLM, Editor. Handbook on Drowning. Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2006