



# 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)
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- Data source: London Knowledge and Intelligence Analysis of ONS data

### Risk factors

- 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)
- RoSPA drowning hot weather drowning alert (2013) <https://www.rospa.com/media-centre/press-office/press-releases/detail/?id=1179>

### Impact

- 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)  
*Costs of child drowning estimated from data from Australia and Canada about the costs of all drownings in the above report, based on about four deaths per year in London and that \$1=£0.75*
- Royal Life Saving - Australia (2017) A 13 year national study of non-fatal drowning in Australia [https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/19938/3985\\_v4\\_RLS\\_NonFatalSymposium\\_ReportHR\\_PROOF\\_LR.pdf](https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/19938/3985_v4_RLS_NonFatalSymposium_ReportHR_PROOF_LR.pdf)

### Actions to prevent

- 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)
- National Water Safety Forum (2015) A future without drowning: The UK national drowning prevention strategy 2016-2026 <http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/strategy/info/uk-drowning-prevention-strategy.pdf>
- WHO (2017) Preventing drowning: An implementation guide <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/255196/9789241511933eng.pdf;jsessionid=A5D77E99564F328F0C3EAA6807912B59?squence=1>
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- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study#swimming-and-water-safety>
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