

Drowning Prevention: Understanding the risks and how to save lives

Learning objectives

1. To understand the issue of drowning and the global push to reduce drowning deaths.
2. To understand the key topic areas in drowning prevention and strategies and advice to keep people safe.

Estimated delivery time: Approximately 35 minutes

Equipment needed: Screen

Slide number	Timings	Practitioner actions
1	< 5 minutes	Welcome the audience and thank them for attending • Introduce yourself clearly: state your name and your role/position • Briefly explain why you are speaking today and your connection to the topic, emphasising that water is part of everyday life – at work, at home, and during leisure time – so the risks to drowning are more common than people think • Being informed doesn't just protect you, it enables you to protect others around you, including friends, colleagues and family members • Water safety is a vital life skill.
2	< 5 minutes	What is the drowning problem? • Drowning is not a small problem. Over the last decade, at least 3 million people have lost their lives to drowning • According to the World Health Organization, in 2021, there were 300,000 estimated drowning deaths globally, which is the equivalent to more than 30 people losing their lives to drowning every hour of every day.
3 - 4	5 minutes	What do we know about people who drown? • Around half of the 300,000 people were among children aged 14 years or younger • According to the latest Global Health Estimates (2021), drowning ranks as the fourth leading cause of death among children aged 1–4 and the third leading cause among those aged 5–14

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		• Male drowning rates are twice that of females • As shown on this slide, in the highest number of drowning deaths occurred in the Western Pacific and South-East Asia followed by Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Americas and Europe.
5	< 5 minutes	But drowning is preventable • “Anyone can drown, but no one should.” – this is a key message from the WHO and underpins global drowning prevention efforts • Drowning is a leading cause of death worldwide but the important point is that drowning can be prevented with the right knowledge and actions • This short presentation will introduce some of the key global issues related to drowning as well as practical steps to help keep you and your family safer around water.
6	5 minutes	Strategic priorities • The world is increasingly recognising drowning as a major global health issue, prompting international action • The United Nations formally addressed this in 2021 by adopting a resolution on global drowning prevention • The World Health Organization was appointed to lead and coordinate global efforts and a Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention was established to bring together countries and organisations to tackle the issue collaboratively • In 2025, a new global strategy for drowning prevention was released to guide action and strengthen efforts worldwide. It has a clear vision: A world free from the burden of drowning, and a clear goal: to reduce drowning globally by 35% by 2035 • From global to national to regional, everyone has a part to play. This starts by learning about water safety and drowning prevention.
7	< 5 minutes	Key topics • Highlight that we will now go through six key topics around drowning prevention and water safety: • Supervision around water • Being safe at the coast • Alcohol awareness • Cold water shock • Find Your Float • World Drowning Prevention Day.
8 – 9	5 minutes	Supervision around water • According to the World Health Organization, children and young people are disproportionately affected by drowning – children under 5 years account for about a quarter of all drowning deaths globally • There are many reasons why children are especially vulnerable – they lack risk awareness and can drown quickly without adult supervision. What can we do to stay safe? What can we do to help keep children safe around water? • Adult supervision – promote the importance of watching children closely near water, even shallow water can be dangerous. This includes pools, the beach, wells and – for small children – buckets of water

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		• Teach children to swim – beyond learning to swim, children should understand the risks associated with water. This includes recognising deep water, strong currents, slippery edges, and sudden drops, as well as understanding why adult supervision is essential • Fencing and barriers – Installing barriers to control access to water hazards, such as covering wells, using doorway barriers and playpens, and fencing swimming pools can help to reduce exposure and risk of drowning for young children.
10 – 11	5 minutes	Being safe at the coast • A day at the beach is a fun way to spend time with friends and family • However, coastlines and beaches around the world can present all sorts of different hazards, which can turn a fun day out into a dangerous situation • Some common coastal hazards include: • Tidal cut offs – this happens when the tide comes in quickly, trapping you in inaccessible areas of the beach • Rip currents – these are strong currents that can quickly carry you away from the shore and out to sea • Off-shore winds – winds that blow away from the shore and out to sea. They are particularly dangerous when combined with watersports like paddleboarding or kayaking • Cliff edges – the ground can be unstable and uneven, causing trips and falls. • Some countries may experience other hazards based on their climate or wildlife. It's important to do your research before you head to the coast and understand what precautions you should take to keep yourself and others safe. What can we do to stay safe? • Choose a lifeguarded beach. The lifeguard can tell you where it's safe to swim and will be able to help you if you get into trouble in the water • Check the weather forecast. If strong winds or storms are forecast, it is safer to stay home • Check the tide times. The tide can come in very rapidly, which could cause you to become cut off or trapped. Check the tide times before you go and only explore as the tide is going out • Pay attention to water safety signs and flags. Water safety signs and flags can warn you of dangers, tell you where it's safe to swim, and provide you with other instructions of how to stay safe around the water • Don't use inflatables in the sea. Rubber rings and novelty inflatables like blow-up flamingos and unicorns are too light to be used in the sea - wind and strong currents can sweep you and your inflatable away from the shore and out to sea in seconds • Stay back from cliff edges. Cliffs can be less stable than they look, and uneven ground can cause trip and falls • Take a fully charged mobile phone. However you're spending time at the coast, it's important to take your phone with you in case you need to call for help.

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12 – 13	5 minutes	Alcohol awareness - Many countries report alcohol consumption as contributor to drowning. It is known to increase risk of drowning for several reasons including: - It can impair judgment and decision-making which can lead people to overestimate their swimming skills and underestimate hazards - It can reduce coordination and balance, making it harder to stay afloat and swim efficiently - It slows reaction time – alcohol slows the body’s response to sudden water hazards - It can increase hypothermia vulnerability – alcohol increases heat loss in cold water and accelerates hypothermia. What can we do to stay safe? - Avoid alcohol when doing a water-based activity - If you’re supervising children near waterways, avoid all alcohol.
14	5 minutes	Cold water shock - Cold water shock is an issue for many areas in the world. It is a sudden, involuntary response that occurs when a person enters cold water (below 15°C) and can have serious effects on both the body and mind. Look at the diagram on the screen, effects occur in three phases: Short term (0–3 minutes): Sudden immersion triggers a gasp reflex, rapid breathing, and an immediate rise in heart rate and blood pressure, increasing the risk of drowning even for experienced swimmers Medium term (3–30 minutes): Muscle strength and coordination decrease, making swimming or staying afloat difficult. Mental clarity and decision-making are also impaired, raising the likelihood of panic Long term (30+ minutes): Prolonged exposure leads to hypothermia, causing a drop in core body temperature, slowed heart rate and breathing, loss of consciousness, and potentially death.
15	5 minutes	Find your float How can we overcome cold water shock or other difficulties if suddenly emerged in water? Floating on your back is a science-backed self-rescue skill that works in both salt and fresh water. However, how we float varies from person to person. This is why it is important to learn what floating looks and feels like for you. You can “find your float” by practicing floating in a supervised location like a swimming pool or lifeguarded beach. By practicing how to float somewhere safe, you will be better prepared if you need to float in an emergency. How to float: - Tilt your head back with your ears under the water - Stay calm and breathe normally - Move your hands to help you float - Don’t worry if your legs sink, everybody floats differently - Shout for help.

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16	5 minutes	World Drowning Prevention Day • World Drowning Prevention Day happens every year on 25 July and provides an important opportunity to get involved in water safety • It's a chance to promote water safety within your family, among friends, and throughout your community • Each year, the World Health Organization and partners release resources, guidance and campaign tools to help countries, communities and organisations run events, education programmes and awareness activities – these are all free • Promote the importance of the day and ask colleagues to help support the day and draw attention to its importance.
17	< 5 minutes	Resources and more information • Working with Xylem and RoSPA, there is a full toolkit which can be used to promote water safety online on social media. There is also a family workbook that can be used to help educate and work with children to increase awareness of water safety • For those that want to know more – the RoSPA and World Health Organization websites have a wealth of information. Thank the audience for their time and attention.