



Water Safety



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Keeping you and your family safe in and around water



London Fire Brigade (LFB) wants everyone to enjoy their hobbies and activities on or close to water, and to be safe, but we know that drowning in the UK is one of the leading causes of accidental death.

Knowing how to avoid various water hazards, what to do in cold water and how to respond quickly and safely in an emergency, can help save lives.

Making smart choices such as swimming at lifeguarded beaches and pools, and not drinking alcohol before going into the water, can also make a big difference.

We've put together some useful advice about water safety for you to share with your loved ones, family and friends. You can use this at home, on your holidays and even abroad.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit: rnli.org/safety/know-the-risks

Did you know that half of those who drown are caught out by unexpected slips, trips and falls into the water?

Alcohol and water safety

#DontDrinkandDrown



A quarter of all adult drowning victims had alcohol in their bloodstream. Alcohol can greatly affect our coordination and awareness of surroundings which often creates false confidence. This can increase the likelihood of risk-taking behaviour. You may think you're in control when, in reality, you are not.

DON'T DRINK AND DROWN! – THINK BEFORE YOU DRINK

- Never drink alcohol and then go for a swim or attempt to jump into water (from any height).
- Keep away from the edge of open water, especially in the dark. You could easily trip and fall.
- It's best to stick together if you are out with friends – don't walk home alone and always avoid routes that take you near water.
- Watch out for your friends if they have been drinking. Don't be afraid to tell them not to enter the water.

Cold water shock

#coldwatershock



All waters around the UK are cold enough to cause cold water shock. The effects are responsible for many of the drownings which occur in the UK every year. The water may feel warm on the surface but just below it can be icy cold – even in hot weather.

WHAT IS COLD WATER SHOCK?

Cold water can be fatal, causing your body to go into shock no matter how fit you are. This can result in panic, anxiety, disorientation and loss of muscular control. These reactions can also cause you to gasp for air, resulting in water being inhaled.

Swimming hard to fight the cold water can make the situation worse. Very quickly you can get severe cramps and hypothermia (dangerously low body temperature).

What to do if ...

#floattolive



#whowillsaveyou?



Trying to rescue a pet could put you at risk.



Use life-saving equipment if available.

YOU GET INTO DIFFICULTY IN THE WATER

Fight your instincts, not the water.

Follow these simple steps:

- Don't panic; staying calm increases your chances of survival.
- Do as little as possible by floating or gently treading water. This helps to control your breathing and lower your heart rate.

LFB supports the RNLI's **FLOAT** campaign:

FIGHT: your instinct to thrash around.

LEAN: back in the water to keep your airways clear.

OPEN: your body up, extend your arms and legs, push your stomach up.

ACTIONS: Gently move your hands and feet to help you float.

TIME: In 60 seconds you'll be able to control your breathing and call for help or swim to safety.

ANOTHER PERSON OR PET NEEDS RESCUING FROM THE WATER

If you go into the water to rescue people, pets or belongings, you could be putting yourself at risk. Who will get help if you get into difficulty?

- Do not enter the water yourself.
- Dial 999 and ask for London Fire Brigade (and if on the Thames or at the coast, the coastguard as well).
- If you don't have a mobile phone, shout to raise the alarm, or go and get help.
- Try to give an exact location of where you are. Look around for

any landmarks or signs; for example bridges will often have numbers on them which can identify their position.

- If a person is in trouble, keep talking to them, encourage them to stay calm and float on their back.
- Keep your eyes on the spot where you last saw them so you can tell the emergency services when they arrive.
- If there is life-saving equipment such as a lifebuoy or a throwline nearby, throw it to them. If not, throw anything that will float.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit: respectthewater.com/how-to-float

Water safety for parents and children



Every child, regardless of their ability to swim, is at risk of drowning and should be supervised at all times in or around water.

KEEPING YOUR CHILDREN SAFE

- Never assume someone else is watching them for you unless they have been clearly asked to do so.
- Dress your children in something bright or recognisable – it is easier to keep an eye on them.
- Supervise bath times and empty the bath straight away after use.
- Empty paddling pools and buckets as soon as they have been used and turn them upside down.
- Prevent access to pools or garden ponds by ensuring they have self-closing gates, secure fences, grilles and locks.
- Securely cover all water storage tanks and drains.

Swimming pool safety

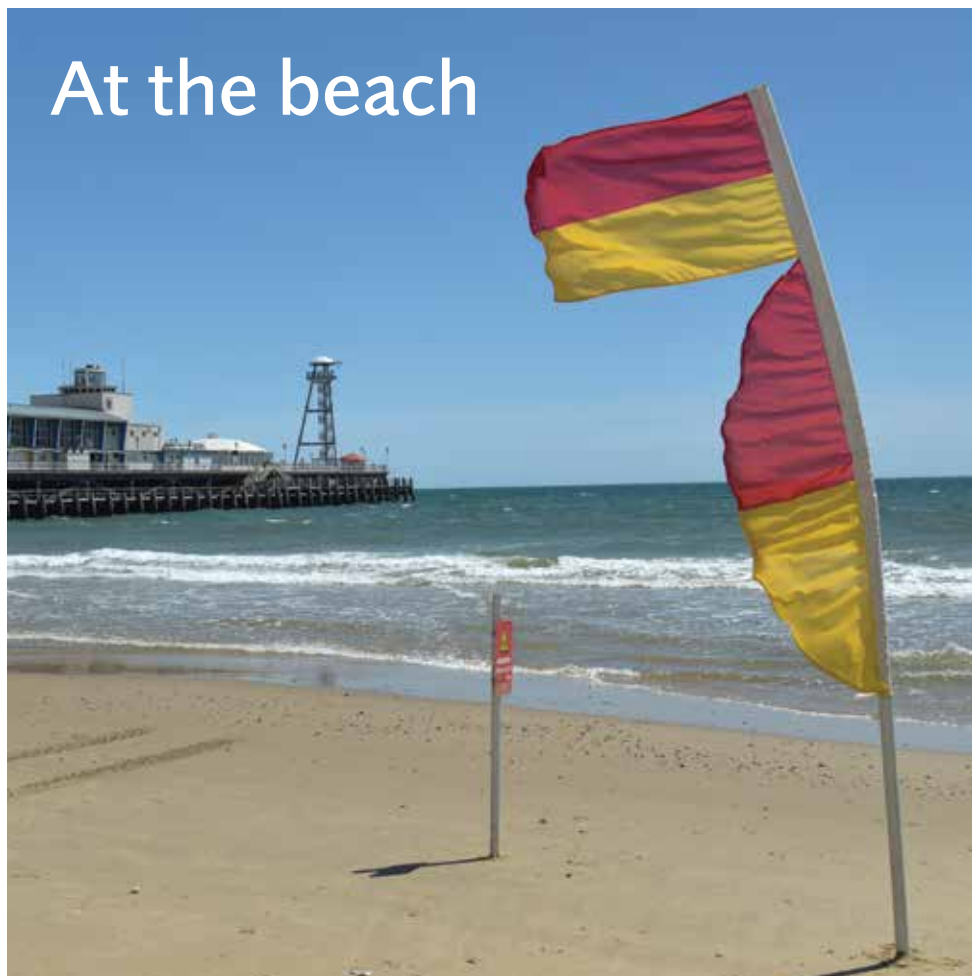


Have fun but make sure you and others are safe in swimming pools here and abroad.

TOP TIPS FOR A SAFE SWIM

- Get to know the pool rules and follow safety signs and advice.
- Take time to check out the water depths.
- Never dive into the shallow end.
- Keep trip hazards (such as toys and inflatables) away from the edge of the pool.
- Never enter a swimming pool after drinking alcohol.
- Remember there could be things like wave machines that you're not aware of, especially at leisure centres and holiday resorts. Always check the layout and water flows of the pool.

At the beach



Check if conditions are suitable for inflatables.



If caught in a rip tide, raise an arm for help.

We all love trips to the beach but remember to look for important safety information. Find a lifeguarded beach where trained professionals are on hand.

TOP SAFETY TIPS

- Inflatable toys and airbeds can drift or get blown out to sea. Do not use them in the sea.
- Do not swim near or dive from rocks, piers, a breakwater or coral.
- Check weather and tide times before you go.
- Always swim parallel to the shore and not straight out. Cold water, waves and currents can tire you out quickly and make it harder to return to shore.

RIP CURRENTS AND TIDES

Rip currents

These are strong currents running out to sea that can easily take swimmers from shallow water out beyond their depth. If you are caught in a rip or a strong current:

- stay calm and float
- raise an arm to signal for help and shout to attract attention
- keep hold of any buoyancy aid like a surfboard or inflatable
- don't swim against the current
- if you can, swim parallel to the beach until you're out of the rip.

Tides

- Tide times vary from day-to-day. Be careful not to get cut off by the tide if you're walking along the shore. It is easy to get caught out and become trapped by rapidly rising water.
- Check the internet for local tide times.

INFORMATION ON THE LOCATION OF LIFEGUARDED BEACHES

Visit: rnli.org/find-my-nearest/lifeguarded-beaches

Flags and signs



Follow any warning flags or safety signs – they are there for a reason! Get to know what they mean but be aware they can vary in different countries.

At UK lifeguarded beaches, these flags are used to indicate where and when it is safe to enter the water.



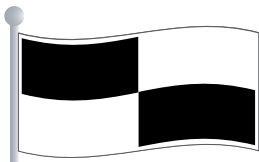
Red and yellow flags

- Lifeguarded area. Safest area to swim, bodyboard and use inflatables. Swim between flags.



Red flag

- Danger! Do not enter the water under any circumstances.



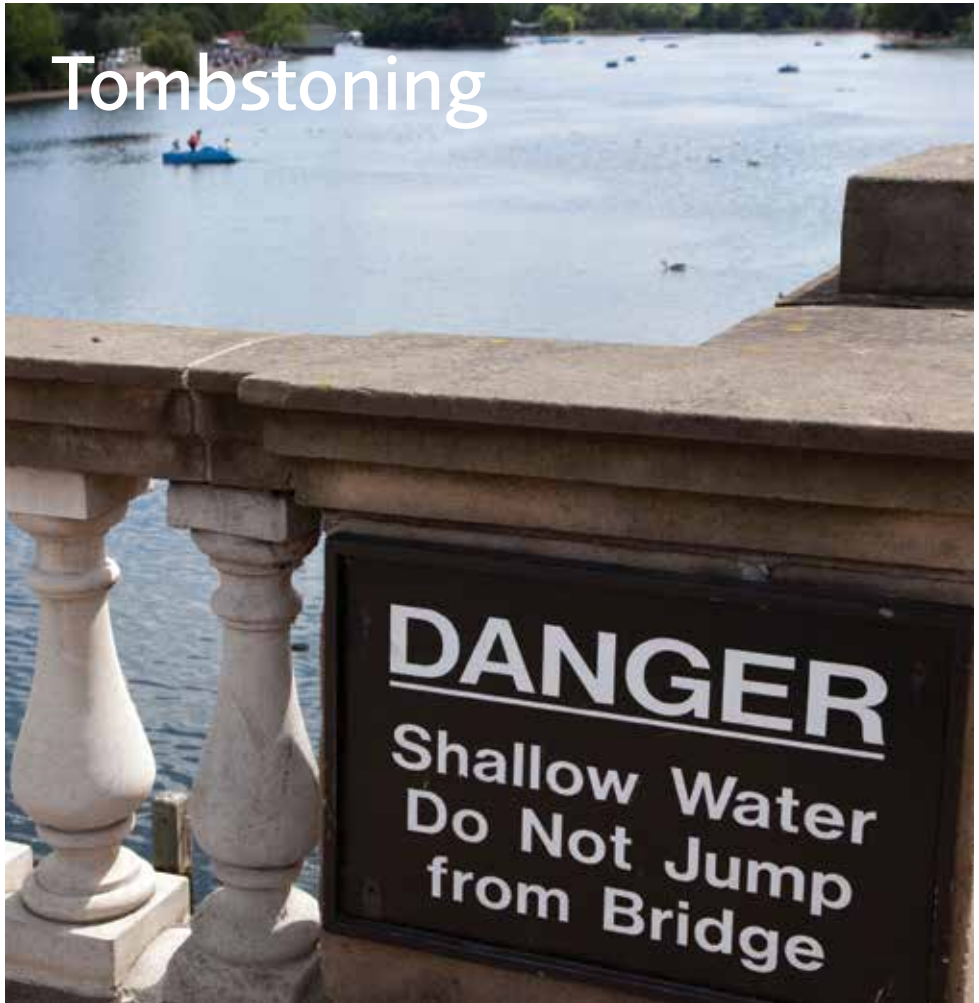
Black and white chequered flags

- Area for surfboards, stand-up paddleboards, kayaks and other non-powered craft. Launch and recovery area for kite surfers and windsurfers. Never swim or bodyboard here.



Orange windsock

- Indicates offshore or strong wind conditions. Never use inflatables when the windsock is flying.



Tombstoning

Tombstoning is dangerous. It involves jumping or diving into the water from a height such as a cliff, bridge or pier.

Don't jump into the unknown

- Rocks or submerged objects may not be visible. This can cause life changing injuries if you jump onto them.
- Water depths alter with the tide – the water may be shallower than it looks.
- The shock of cold water can make it difficult to swim.
- Conditions can change rapidly making it impossible to know if it is safe.
- Strong currents can rapidly sweep people away or make it impossible to get out.

Open water safety

#underwaterdangers



Consider joining a swimming club.



Use floatation equipment where needed.

Open water swimming is becoming increasingly popular but even strong swimmers can get into trouble.

Accidental drownings often occur at places like rivers, lakes, canals, flooded quarries and reservoirs. The water can be colder and deeper than you think or have strong currents and unpredictable river flows.

SWIM SAFE

Just make sure you:

- are able to swim, float and tread water.
- never swim alone. The safest way to wild swim is with a club.
- let people know where you are and what you are doing.
- consider wearing a brightly coloured hat plus a tow float for visibility.
- consider wearing a wetsuit.
- carry a mobile phone.
- never mix swimming and alcohol.
- swim in a recognised commercial venue – often supervised with tested water and no hidden dangers.
- call 999 (or 112 for the coastguard) in an emergency.

REMEMBER

Look out for hidden dangers – swimming in unsupervised locations increases risks.

Activities in, on, or near the water

#BeWaterAware



Take care near the water's edge.



Control your dog near water.

WATER SPORTS

Water sports such as canoeing and sailing are popular pastimes. Always make sure you are properly prepared, aware of the dangers and know your limits – don't take risks.

- Consider joining a club for support, guidance and safety advice.
- Ensure that someone knows your plans and the time that you expect to return.
- Take a fully charged mobile phone with you in case of an emergency.
- Check weather and conditions before setting out and be prepared to cancel or change your plans if bad weather is forecast.
- Maintain any equipment that you are using to ensure that it is safe and working properly.

- Use appropriate floatation equipment such as a lifejacket or buoyancy aid.

It is always useful to think about having an emergency kit containing items such as a throwline (floating aid with a rope attached) a whistle and flares, and know how to use them.

For further information and advice:
[respectthewater.com/activities](https://www.respectthewater.com/activities)

RUNNING, WALKING OR CYCLING NEAR WATER

Walkers and runners

Walkers and runners account for the largest proportion of UK drownings.

- Stick to designated pathways and stay away from the water's edge, especially when water levels are high.
- Pay attention to hazards such as uneven river banks, tree roots, ropes and mooring stakes on towpaths.
- Cliff edges may be unstable and can give way.
- Know your route and whereabouts. Use a map or smart phone app.

Dog walkers

- Make sure you can control your dog on and off the lead near water. If you do let it off the lead always check it is safe for both of you.
- Never enter the water to rescue your dog. They often manage to scramble out on their own. If you get into trouble, who will rescue you?



ANGLING

Tragically a number of anglers lose their lives through drowning each year. Like all water sports it is important to think ahead.

- Always try to set up in a safe position with even ground.
- Wear a floatation vest when wading and remember, flooded wellington

boots or waders can make it very difficult to move in the event of any danger or emergency.

- Be aware of local water hazards such as weirs, strong currents, slippery or undercut banks.

Winter safety – dangers of ice



If you are out and about or taking a walk in cold weather with your family, friends or pets and your route takes you near water, keep away from the edge. Never go onto any type of frozen water, including frozen ponds, lakes and canals. Keep dogs on a lead.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FALL THROUGH THE ICE

- Keep calm and shout for 'help'.
- Spread your arms across the surface of the ice in front of you.
- If the ice is strong enough, kick your legs to slide onto the ice.
- Once out of the water roll away to prevent further cracks, lie flat and pull yourself across the ice towards the bank.
- If you cannot climb out, keep as still as possible with your head clear of the water and wait for help to arrive.
- Once out, seek immediate medical attention.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE ELSE FALLS THROUGH THE ICE

- Don't go onto the ice or into the frozen water if you see a person or animal getting into difficulty.
- Stay on the bank, shout for help and phone 999.
- Shout to the person to 'keep still, hold your head above water' and offer reassurance to keep them calm.
- If the person is too far away, **do not** attempt to rescue them. Wait for the emergency services.

Water safety in a flood



Avoid driving in floods.



Use sandbags to protect your property.

Just six inches of water can cause an engine to stall or result in a driver losing control of their vehicle. A foot of water moving at just 6 mph is enough to float a car. Two feet of rushing water will carry most vehicles away.

WHEN FLOODING IS FORECAST

- Be alert – listen out for weather reports or updates for flooding in your area.
- Think about preparing a flood kit or 'grab bag' of essentials in case you have to leave your home.
- Protect your property – use sand bags and, if possible, move belongings to higher levels.
- Look out for your neighbours – make sure they know what to do.

DURING A FLOOD

- Avoid walking through floodwaters – six inches of fast flowing water can knock an adult over.
- Don't swim or allow children or pets to go near or play in floodwater. There is a danger of being swept away or struck by an object in the water.
- Floodwater can be hazardous. It may be contaminated or polluted.

For further practical advice during periods of flooding:

gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding/future-flooding
and
nationalfloodforum.org.uk/about-flooding/preparing/emergency-flood-kit

DRIVING IN FLOODED CONDITIONS

Vehicles can quickly become unstable in moving water. Avoid driving into a flooded area or find an alternative route.

You can sign up for free flood warnings by phone, email or text message if your home is at risk of flooding:

gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings

If your car stops in water:

- ensure that you and your passengers unbuckle seatbelt(s) and climb out to safety.

- call the emergency services as soon as possible after leaving the vehicle.

If you become trapped in your vehicle:

- turn on all the lights (including hazards), shout and sound the horn to attract attention. If you have a mobile phone call 999.

For further advice around vehicles in water
rospa.com/leisure-safety/water/advice/vehicles/



[london-fire.gov.uk](https://www.london-fire.gov.uk)



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