



Staying safe over the holidays

Why is the holiday period a particularly high-risk time?

Here are some of the potential increased risk factors:

The heat:

Hotter weather means more people flocking to waterways to cool off. People who are not necessarily strong swimmers are perhaps spending more time in the water than usual.

Alcohol:

The festive season notoriously means a lot of people are consuming alcohol in celebration. Often, this is close to bodies of water which is a problem when considering alcohol impairs judgement.

Increased distractions:

The festive season often brings with it more visitors, more phone calls, more things to be actioned. These things have a tendency to distract us.

No 'dedicated watcher':

At gatherings, responsibility is often deflected as we assume someone else is keeping watch. The more people around, the more that responsibility is unconsciously deflected.

What are the top 3 locations for where drownings happen?



1. Beaches
2. Rivers/creeks/streams
3. Oceans/harbours

Seventy-five people died from inland waterway accidents between July 2015 and June 2016, with 63 dying as a result of a beach swim during that same period (Australia).

Justin Scarr of Royal Life Saving indicated that, "Often rivers, lakes and swimming holes can look calm but there are still significant currents and debris washing through these areas. There are steep drop-offs and significant changes."

The Respect The River campaign is a great initiative by Royal Life Saving in terms of all things inland waterway safety. Check out this link:

<http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/programs/respecttheriver/about>

What can be done?

- *Wear a lifejacket.*
- *Supervise children and vulnerable others.*
- *Never swim alone.*
- *Learn CPR and first aid.*
- *Alcohol and water don't mix.*
- *Learn lifesaving skills. Many 'rescues' end in tragedy, as those undertaking*



the rescues are not trained and therefore put themselves in high-risk situations.

- *Only swim at patrolled beaches, and swim between the flags.*
- *Don't panic. If you perceive yourself to be in some sort of danger, do your best to stay calm. Panicking is likely to cause you to use more oxygen, increase your cortisol levels, and subsequently increase the likelihood of making poor decisions.*
- *Educate yourself. Do you know how to identify a rip?
Do you know the extra risks associated with swimming in inland waterways?*
- [*This Water Awareness fact sheet may be useful.*](#)
- *Fence all potential hazardous waterways (a drowning this season took place in a backyard pond)*
- [*Fence guidelines*](#)
- *Know your limitations. Remember that many drown trying to assist others who are in danger. Don't engage in risk-taking behaviour around waterways*
- *Raise awareness. Talk about what can be done and raise awareness with those around you. Specifically, if you have friends or family who did not grow up on the coast or near a waterway and therefore haven't had the same levels of exposure, teach them what they can do (sharing this blog with them would be a good start).*
- *Remove pool toys from the pool when not in use. Pack away portable pools.*
- *Enrol your child (or yourself) in swimming lessons. Like most things, swimming lessons are not a 'one size fits all' approach and so be sure to choose the type of lessons that are most suitable.*
- *Have at least one 'dedicated watcher' at all times, to ensure everyone stays safe. Be sure that changes in dedicated watchers are communicated clearly amongst everyone. According to American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), of the approximately 750 children who will drown next year, about 375 will do so within 22 metres of their parent or other adult. In 10 percent of those drownings, the adult will actually watch the child do it, having no idea it is happening; which brings us to our next point...*

Drowning probably doesn't look like what you'd expect it to

The reality is that the waving, splashing, and yelling that dramatic conditioning (television) prepares us to look for is rarely seen in real life.

Drowning is almost always a deceptively quiet event.

That being the case, would you know if someone was drowning right in front of you?

The Instinctive Drowning Response—so named by Francesco A. Pia, Ph.D. outlines the following points:

1. *“Except in rare circumstances, drowning people are physiologically unable to call out for help”.*
2. *The mouths of drowning people are not above the surface of the water long enough for them to exhale, inhale, and call out for help.*
3. *Drowning people cannot wave for help. Nature instinctively forces them to extend their arms laterally and press down on the water's surface.*
4. *Throughout the Instinctive Drowning Response, drowning people cannot voluntarily control their arm movements. Physiologically, drowning people who are struggling on the surface of the water cannot stop drowning and perform voluntary movements such as waving for help, moving toward a rescuer, or reaching out for a piece of rescue equipment.*
5. *From beginning to end of the Instinctive Drowning Response people's bodies remain upright in the water, with no evidence of a supporting kick. Unless rescued by a trained lifeguard, these drowning people can only struggle on the surface of the water from 20 to 60 seconds before submersion occurs.*

So what should you look out for?

- *Head low in the water, mouth at water level.*
- *Head tilted back with mouth open.*
- *Eyes glassy and empty, unable to focus.*
- *Eyes closed.*
- *Hair over forehead or eyes.*
- *Not using legs—vertical.*
- *Hyperventilating or gasping.*
- *Trying to swim in a particular direction but not making headway.*
- *Trying to roll over on the back.*
- *Appear to be climbing an invisible ladder.*

How can you learn more about wandering and drowning prevention?

Parents

Autism Swim offers online training and resources to parents around Australia, so they can do everything they can to keep their little ones safe. [Autism Swim's Wandering and Drowning Prevention Toolkit](#) is available to parents, and is the only one of its kind in Australia.

Aquatic Professionals

Give your swimmers the best chance of developing skill-sets within the water, by educating yourself on the different learning styles of your swimmers. [Become Autism Swim Approved today!](#)

If you would like any further information on the contents contained above, send us an email (hello@autismswim.com.au), and we would be more than happy to assist.

We can also point you in the direction of counselling services if you have experienced a traumatic event.

PLEASE STAY SAFE.

The team at AS

