

IRISH WATER SAFETY

PRESS RELEASE

18 Dec 2017

Minimize your risk of drowning this Christmas

Irish Water Safety is concerned that many people planning to take part in Christmas swims may take chances beyond what is acceptably safe and are cautioning the public to minimize the length of time they remain in water due to the risk of hypothermia as water temperature is approximately 11° Celsius at sea and 5° Celsius in freshwater.

“Cold shock” and hypothermia can overwhelm the fittest of swimmers but steps can be taken to remain accident free:

- Cold water cools muscles faster than during warmer summer swims and may cause an increased heart rate, dizziness, cramp and panic.
- Swimmers should “Get In, Get Out and Warm Up”, avoiding extended periods of exposure.
- Before entering the water throw some water down the back of your neck to allow your body prepare for cold water immersion
- Alcohol should be avoided before swimming as it impairs judgment.
- Ensure that you have safe access and egress with appropriate shallow shelving, steps or ladders. Less agile people should be mindful that steps leading into the water might be dangerous due to the possible growth of algae. Organisers should ensure that slipways or steps have been cleaned of slime, weed and algae.
- Christmas Swim organisers should ensure that they provide comprehensive details of each event to the Irish Coast Guard and local Gardai.
- Ensure that you have lifeguards for the event and adequate safety cover depending on numbers in regard to rescue boards, kayaks, surf skis and safety boats.
- Check with the Safety Officer, who will advise and has the ultimate responsibility for making decisions.
- If the seas are rough and weather deteriorates, wait for a more suitable day to support your charity commitment.

Safeguarding your loved ones extends beyond Christmas swims to family walks by rivers, lakes and shorelines. A full moon on January 1st will increase the risk of stranding on our coastline due to the spring tides. Parents can be lulled into a false sense of security when visiting relatives living close to water hazards such as slurry pits, exposed drains and canals. Safeguard your children with constant uninterrupted supervision and make a New Year’s resolution to learn swimming and lifesaving skills and to always wear a lifejacket on water.

On average, 133 people drown every year, eleven every month. In the last ten years thirty children aged fourteen and under drowned in Ireland.

Media Enquiries:

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ADDITIONAL CHRISTMAS WATER SAFETY ADVICE - Flooding & Ice:

Flooding:

1. LISTEN TO THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL RADIO FOR MET EIREANN UPDATES.
2. CHECK ON NEIGHBOURS PARTICULARLY IF THEY ARE ELDERLY, INFIRMED OR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN.
3. MOVE YOUR VEHICLES TO HIGHER GROUND.
4. CHECK YOUR SMALL CRAFT TO ENSURE IT IS WELL SECURED OR MOORED.
5. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE WARM CLOTHES, FOOD, DRINK, A TORCH AND RADIO.
6. BLOCK DOORWAYS AND AIRBRICKS WITH SANDBAGS OR PLASTIC BAGS FILLED WITH EARTH. FLOODGATE PRODUCTS WILL ALSO WORK EFFECTIVELY.
7. SWITCH OFF GAS AND ELECTRICITY SUPPLIES IF FLOODING IS IMMINENT.
8. CHECK THE TIME OF HIGH WATER IN THE NEWSPAPER.
9. NEVER TRY TO SWIM THROUGH FAST FLOWING WATER.
10. CARRY A MOBILE PHONE AT ALL TIMES – CALL 112 IN EMERGENCY.
11. WEAR SUITABLE PROTECTIVE CLOTHING & A LIFEJACKET IN OR AROUND WATER.
12. NEVER PUT YOUR FEET DOWN IF SWEEP AWAY.
13. FLOODING ON ROADS WILL BE DEEPER AT DIPS AND AROUND BRIDGES.
14. MANHOLE COVERS MAY HAVE BEEN MOVED DUE TO THE HEAVY FLOW OF WATER.
15. THE DANGERS ARE MULTIPLIED DURING THE HOURS OF DARKNESS.

Ice:

1. RESCUING ANOTHER PERSON FROM ICE CAN BE DANGEROUS. THE SAFEST WAY TO PERFORM A RESCUE IS FROM SHORE. USE YOUR MOBILE.
2. CALL FOR HELP AT 999 OR 112 AND ASK FOR THE EMERGENCY SERVICES. GIVE YOUR PRECISE LOCATION, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN DIFFICULTY AND ANY CONSPICUOUS BUILDING OR LANDMARK NEARBY.
3. CHECK IF YOU CAN REACH THE PERSON USING A RINGBUOY AND ROPE, LONG POLE, ITEMS OF CLOTHING OR BRANCH FROM SHORE – IF SO, LIE DOWN AND EXTEND THE POLE TO THE PERSON.
4. IF YOU CAN NOT REACH THEM THEN PASS OUT SOMETHING THAT WILL FLOAT E.G. A RINGBUOY, EMPTY WATER PROOF CONTAINER E.G. OIL, MILK CONTAINERS.
5. INSTRUCT THE CASUALTY TO KEEP STILL TO MAINTAIN THEIR HEAT AND ENERGY;
6. IF YOU GO ONTO ICE, WEAR A PFD AND CARRY A LONG POLE OR BRANCH TO TEST THE ICE IN FRONT OF YOU. BRING SOMETHING TO REACH OR THROW TO THE PERSON (E.G. POLE, WEIGHTED ROPE, LINE OR TREE BRANCH).
7. WHEN NEAR THE BREAK, LIE DOWN TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR WEIGHT AND SLOWLY CRAWL TOWARD THE HOLE.
8. REMAINING LOW, EXTEND OR THROW YOUR EMERGENCY RESCUE DEVICE (POLE, ROPE, LINE OR BRANCH) TO THE PERSON.
9. HAVE THE PERSON KICK WHILE YOU PULL THEM OUT.
10. MOVE THE PERSON TO A SAFE POSITION ON SHORE OR WHERE YOU ARE SURE THE ICE IS THICK.
11. ALL CASUALTIES SHOULD BE TAKEN TO HOSPITAL EVEN IF THEY APPEAR TO BE UNAFFECTED BY THEIR ORDEAL AS THEY WILL BE SUFFERING FROM HYPOTHERMIA.
12. NEVER GO OUT ON ICE ALONE AND ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT.

Personal Safety

1. CALL FOR HELP.
2. RESIST THE IMMEDIATE URGE TO CLIMB BACK OUT WHERE YOU FELL IN. THE ICE IS WEAK IN THIS AREA.
3. USE THE AIR TRAPPED IN YOUR CLOTHING TO GET INTO A FLOATING POSITION ON YOUR STOMACH.
4. REACH FORWARD ONTO THE BROKEN ICE WITHOUT PUSHING DOWN. KICK YOUR LEGS TO PUSH YOUR TORSO ON THE ICE.
5. WHEN YOU ARE BACK ON THE ICE, CRAWL ON YOUR STOMACH OR ROLL AWAY FROM THE OPEN AREA WITH YOUR ARMS AND LEGS SPREAD OUT AS FAR AS POSSIBLE TO EVENLY DISTRIBUTE YOUR BODY WEIGHT. DO NOT STAND UP! LOOK FOR SHORE AND MAKE SURE YOU ARE GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

Ice Rescue Tips:

1. AVOID GOING OUT ON ICE AND DISCOURAGE OTHERS FROM DOING SO.
2. CARRY YOUR MOBILE - CALL FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THE EMERGENCY SERVICES.
3. DO NOT ATTEMPT A RESCUE BY GOING ONTO ICE, RATHER USE ANY
4. INSTRUCT THE CASUALTY TO KEEP STILL THEREBY MAINTAINING THEIR HEAT AND ENERGY.
5. TRY TO FIND SOMETHING CLOSE BY THAT WILL EXTEND YOUR REACH SUCH AS A RINGBUOY, ROPE, POLE, BRANCH OR ITEMS OF CLOTHING. THROW THIS TO THE CASUALTY. THEN MAKE SURE YOU ARE STABLE ON THE BANK BY LYING DOWN OR GETTING SOMEONE TO HOLD ONTO YOU AND ATTEMPT TO PULL THE CASUALTY FROM THE WATER.
6. IF YOU CANNOT FIND SOMETHING WITH WHICH TO PERFORM A REACH OR THROW RESCUE, TRY TO FIND SOMETHING THAT WILL FLOAT TO THROW OR PUSH OUT TO THEM. THIS WILL HELP KEEP THE CASUALTY AFLOAT UNTIL ASSISTANCE ARRIVES.
7. THROUGHOUT YOUR RESCUE KEEP OFF THE ICE, AND CONTINUE TO REASSURE THE CASUALTY, KEEPING THEM TALKING UNTIL HELP ARRIVES.
8. ALL CASUALTIES SHOULD BE TAKEN TO HOSPITAL EVEN IF THEY APPEAR TO BE UNAFFECTED BY THEIR ORDEAL AS THEY WILL BE SUFFERING FROM HYPOTHERMIA.

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