

## **REDUCING IMMERSION-RELATED DEATHS THROUGH EDUCATION**

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As an island nation, the UK is surrounded by about 7,700 thousands of miles of coast, it contains thousands of additional miles of inland waterways. This helps explain why water-related deaths are the second most common cause of accidental death and, in the UK, account for more accidental fatalities each year than fire deaths in the home or cycling deaths on the road. On average, over 400 people die due to immersion-related deaths each year, that's about one every 20 hours. Immersion deaths are not limited to those who live by the coast or to those intending to enter the water; although over 15 million people in the UK regularly partake in water-based leisure pursuits, 44% of immersion deaths involve people who had no intention of entering the water.

It can be concluded that anyone in the UK is exposed to the risk of immersion-related death or morbidity. The groups most at risk tend to be young children and adolescents, people at the start of their productive lives; this represents a sad and often unnecessary waste of life and potential. On average, we lose one child a week in the UK due to immersion.

Learning to swim has most often been regarded as the solution to the immersion death problem. Despite this, 45% of children aged 7-11 (Key Stage 2) cannot swim 25m unaided. Whilst learning to swim (or float) is important, there is another aspect to water safety that is often over-looked but could save many lives. This aspect is a basic understanding of the risks associated with water and how to minimise those risks. Every year many people die because they either: a. Under-estimate the risks associated with water, b. Do not understand tides or rips and c. Do not know how to behave when in trouble. Examples abound, not least from the summer of 2016.

Many agencies do outstanding work in education, teaching children to swim, signage, lifeguarding, search & rescue etc. to try and reduce the number of immersion deaths. But, despite the level of risk and the large number of deaths and injury, the National Curriculum contains no lessons on water safety and what to do if accidentally immersed. This is an important omission, indeed, people do understand the need for such education; in the UK, two-thirds of individuals asked regarded water safety as essential or important when visiting the coast or riverside.

**This brief paper represents a call to have one lesson on water safety included in the National Curriculum; this should directly result in a reduction in the number of unnecessary immersion-related deaths in the UK each year.**

A simple, outline lesson plan for a 45 minute lesson on water safety is presented below. It is aimed at 12-13 year olds, that is, those at the younger end of the high risk group for immersion-related deaths.

### **References**

- Amateur Swimming Association (2014) Taking School Swimming Seriously. The 2014 School Swimming Census.
- Golden & Tipton (2002) Essential of Sea Survival. Human Kinetics
- Maritime Coastguard Agency (2014) Casualty Panel statistics from 2007-2013.
- National Water Safety Forum (2016) The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-2026.
- Royal National Lifeboat Association (2015) Campaign Assessment
- Tipton & Wooler (2016) The Science of Beach Lifeguarding

# LESSON PLAN (Draft Outline)

Year: 8 (12 years old)

Subject Area: Water Safety

## Objectives & Goals

- Teach an understanding of the risks associated with immersion in water of different types
- Teach basic lifesaving skills that can mitigate the risks identified above

Mode: 45 minute lesson

## Content

Topic	Areas covered	Resources (examples)
Responses to immersion in cold water	- Stages of immersion associated with hazards	PowerPoint slide set* Videos e.g. RNLI Respect the Water Campaign videos and training films on cold shock
Waves, Surges & Tides	- What causes tides? - Tides on different beaches - Dangers associated with tides	PowerPoint slide set <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ohDG7RqQ9I">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ohDG7RqQ9I</a> <a href="https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/understanding-waves-tides-and-currents">https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/understanding-waves-tides-and-currents</a>
Rips	- What causes rips? - Rips on different beaches - Dangers associated with rips	PowerPoint slide set <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ4hcaJ91TY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ4hcaJ91TY</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jrRvNCWaBw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jrRvNCWaBw</a>
Reducing the risk	- What to do on accidental immersion - What to do in a rip - Planning a trip to a beach - Protective equipment	PowerPoint slide set Learning material from UK agencies and institutions (e.g. RLSS, RoSPA, RNLI, SLSGB, RYA, MCA, NWSF etc.) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVgDBUKXjZc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVgDBUKXjZc</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-R_6Lynsg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-R_6Lynsg</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_6mP_vLU5s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_6mP_vLU5s</a> <a href="http://www.swimming.org/swimsafe/swimming-safety-tips/">http://www.swimming.org/swimsafe/swimming-safety-tips/</a> <a href="http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/about/members.asp">http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/about/members.asp</a>

\* The necessary slides can be provided for each section