

IRISH WATER SAFETY

PRESS RELEASE

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Christmas Survival Guide

Key water safety messages for this festive season.

The Christmas season is a time when thousands of people around the country must take extra care when taking part in sponsored swims in support of the many charitable causes. Thousands more are at risk when taking walks by rivers, lakes and shorelines and even more are lulled into a false sense of security when visiting relatives living close to water hazards such as slurry pits, exposed drains and canals. Irish Water Safety has compiled a Christmas survival guide to staying safe around water at Christmas time.

- **Christmas and New Year Swims:**

Get in, Get out, warm up.

Christmas day charity swimmers occasionally take chances beyond what is acceptably safe, finding themselves left without sufficient strength to climb out of the water due to the cold.

Cold winter waters can cause “cold shock” and hypothermia can set in within minutes, overwhelming the fittest of swimmers. If sea conditions deteriorate then the charity swim should be cancelled. If you see a person in difficulties do not attempt a rescue for which you are not trained. Make use of any nearby rescue equipment such as a ringbuoy and in the event of an emergency call the emergency services at 112. No alcohol should be taken before the swim.

Christmas Charity Swims

The Christmas season in Ireland is a time when thousands of people around the country traditionally run sponsored swims in support of many charitable causes.

- People organising these swims on Christmas Day, St. Stephen’s Day or New Year’s Day should ensure that they provide comprehensive details of each event to the Irish Coast Guard and local Gardai.
- Each event should have a Safety Officer appointed, who will advise those concerned on safety and have the ultimate responsibility for making decisions in relation to the swim being on or off on the day.
- If the seas are rough and weather deteriorates, they should defer the event to a more suitable day without question – do not take a chance on running the event.
- Many participants will not have swum since the summer and the temperature of the water has now dropped considerably. It is a fallacy that alcohol will keep you warm when entering the water; in fact it has the reverse effect and could kill you. Irish Water Safety strongly recommends that no alcohol be taken either before the swim or immediately after the swim and also remind people that they may be in breach of the drink driving laws when driving to or from the event.
- Cold water can cause cold shock and hypothermia in minutes, because the temperature of the water at this time of year will be below 50°F/10°C.
- Ensure that you have safe access and egress with appropriate shallow shelving or ladders as appropriate. Elderly people should be mindful that steps leading into the water might be dangerous due to the increased growth of algae in wintertime. Organisers should ensure that slipways or steps have been cleaned of slime, weed and algae. Contact your Local Authority to have this completed.
- Swimmers’ remaining in the water for extended periods in a gesture of bravado is not acceptable. The message is “**Get In, Get Out and Warm Up**”.

LIFESAVING WATER SAFETY POINTS THIS CHRISTMAS:

1. Supervise children at all times, but especially if you are on holidays abroad this Christmas.
2. Never swim alone in a pool unprotected by lifeguards; ensure that there are lifeguards on duty within the pool area.
3. Avoid cold shock and hypothermia on Christmas and New Year Charity Swims. Throw a handful of water down the back of your neck before you take your plunge to help avoid cold shock.
4. Do not engage in any water-based activities after the consumption of alcohol.
5. Alcohol should not be consumed before your water safety activity
6. Always wear a lifejacket when boating or participating in other aquatic sports.
7. Stay away from the edge when fishing from rocks or on the banks of rivers, or lakes always wearing a lifejacket.
8. In a Marine Emergency call 999 or 112 and ask for the Coast Guard, always call early.

- **Flooding:**

Avoid flooded areas as fast running water and submerged hazards pose a serious threat.

Rising waters, fast flowing currents and dangerous hidden hazards are all present with rising and receding flood waters. Move to higher ground immediately using alternative routes to avoid becoming trapped and respect the power of fast rising waters and the dangers of exposed drains and submerged objects. No driver or pedestrian should take a chance passing through flooded roadways. Parents should caution children that floodwaters hide the true depth and that manhole covers may be open and that small streams when swollen are very fast and deeper than normal. Knowing what to do when surprised by localised flash flooding will help avoid property damage, injury and drowning.

What should I do when I hear a Flood Warning?

1. Listen to the national and local radio for met eireann updates. Click on <http://www.flooding.ie/en/> for further information.
2. Check on neighbours particularly if they are elderly, infirmed or families with young children.
3. Move your vehicles to higher ground.
4. Move animal stock to higher ground.
5. Check your small craft to ensure they are well secured or moored, consider taking them up on a trailer for safety.
6. Make sure you have warm clothes, food, drink, a torch and radio.
7. Block doorways and airbricks with sandbags or plastic bags filled with earth. Floodgate products will work effectively also.
8. Switch off gas and electricity supplies if flooding is imminent.
9. Check the time of High Water in the Newspaper or at www.irishtides.ie

Personal Safety

1. Avoid flood waters at all times.
2. carry a mobile phone at all times in case you need to call for help – call 112 in emergency.
3. Wear suitable protective clothing & a Lifejacket in on or around water.
4. Never try to swim through fast flowing water.
5. Never put your feet down if swept away.
6. Flooding on roads will be deeper at dips and around bridges.
7. Stay away from sea and flood defences.
8. when walking or driving, be aware of manhole covers and gratings that may have been moved due to the heavy flow of water.
9. Take care when using electric appliances in damp or flood conditions.
10. Remember that during the hours of darkness the dangers are multiplied.

- **Tides**

As you walk shorelines, keep a close eye on new moon tidal advances and carry your mobile in case you are cut off.

On December 17th and January 16th, a new moon will increase the range of our tides causing higher and lower tides, however there is still a risk between these periods where large areas of beach and rocks which we normally don't see will be exposed. Many people enjoy exploring these new areas of beach and in particular enjoy picking shellfish to eat. The risk of becoming stranded as the tide advances can quickly leave people cut off from the shore which is why people should carry their mobile and call 112 if required. All those boating, surfing, diving or swimming should be aware of tidal streams around our coast over the Christmas weekend and at all times.

- **Ice**

Should we experience a repeat of the icy conditions of 2010 and 2011, there are dangers specific to frozen canals, rivers and lakes. Children are especially at risk as they are attracted to playing on ice. Constant supervision is the key to keeping children off the ice as there is no such thing as safe ice. Also at risk are individuals who attempt to rescue others fallen through ice. Ice-related drownings often occur when the rescuer gets into difficulty attempting to rescue another person or a family pet. Playing or fishing on the frozen edges of a river, lake or canal is perilous as ice can be quite thick in one area yet dangerously thin in others.

Ice Safety Tips to stay out of danger

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 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 cannot 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 lifejacket 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.

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