



Anyone can drown,  
no one should.

# World Drowning Prevention Day Guidance for Organizations



## Background and Purpose

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a historic [resolution](#) on global drowning prevention on 28 April 2021. The resolution recognises the scale and impact of drowning prevention globally, and calls for coordinated multisectoral action to prevent drowning, a leading cause of injury-related death and disability worldwide.

A key element of the resolution is that it establishes a new UN-recognised [World Drowning Prevention Day](#), all stakeholders, including governments, non-governmental organisations and their partners, are invited and encouraged to contribute to, and engage in, this global day of activity.



## Key facts about drowning

Drowning has been the cause of over 2.5 million preventable deaths in the last decade. It is a significant international issue that to date has been largely unrecognised relative to its impact.

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WHO estimates that 235,600 people died from drowning in 2019. This figure excludes drownings attributable to flood-related disasters and water transport incidents, so is considered an under-representation.

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Drowning is among the ten leading causes of death for children and young people aged 1-24 years in every region of the world.

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More than 90% of drowning deaths occur in rivers, lakes, wells, domestic water storage vessels and swimming pools in low- and middle-income countries.

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Flood-related disasters increasingly affect millions of people globally due in part to the escalating adverse impacts of climate change, and drowning is the leading cause of deaths during floods.

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Over 60% of all drowning deaths are in the Western Pacific and South-East Asia regions. Rates of drowning deaths per 100 000 population are highest in the Western Pacific region, followed by the African region.

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Drowning rates differ by over 68-fold between the countries with the lowest and highest drowning rates.

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## About this guidance

This guidance is meant to help inspire and plan activities and events, to mark the first “World Drowning Prevention Day”, on 25 July 2021.

It provides background information about the establishment of World Drowning Prevention Day, provides some key messages that participants and observers can amplify, and offers ideas about the types of activities and events that can be developed by all sectors (but especially at national/local level), to utilise this day to its full potential.

### **Why is a UN Resolution about drowning important?**

Securing a first-ever UN Resolution on drowning prevention establishes the issue and its prevention as an important issue, recognised by all 193 Member States of the UN. Given the scale of drowning deaths, globally, and its prevent-ability, it is both tragic and surprising this issue has not attracted more engagement across the UN and its Member States until quite recently. This has also contributed to drowning prevention not receiving enough attention at the regional and national levels. The resolution draws clear connections between drowning and its negative impacts on global sustainable development. It also shows the relevance of drowning and its prevention to various initiatives and agreements for addressing climate change and reducing disaster risk.

### **What does the resolution say about World Drowning Prevention Day?**

The Resolution invites all Member States and their partners to observe the Day annually in accordance with national priorities,

*‘...in order to raise awareness of the importance of drowning prevention and the need for urgent coordinated multisectoral action to improve water safety, with the aim of reducing preventable deaths’.*



## So how can I use World Drowning Prevention Day in my setting?

Consider World Drowning Prevention Day as an opportunity to advance drowning prevention messaging and action, relevant to your local, national or regional context. Organization's will have different priorities, based on their varied contexts and settings, but consider using World Drowning Prevention Day to do any or all of the following:

- Draw attention to the global scale of drowning;
- Draw attention to your national, or local scale of drowning;
- Start, or continue conversations about drowning and its prevention at local, national, and global levels; and
- Generate awareness and action on measures recommended by WHO to prevent drowning.
- Governments, with support from civil society, academia, the private sector and the international community, are all encouraged to plan activity or events to mark World Drowning Prevention Day.
- This milestone is a unique opportunity to make progress on reducing this preventable cause of mortality and saving lives.



Photo: Water Safety Ireland

# Organizing your activities and messaging for World Drowning Prevention Day

The core part of this guidance is divided into 3 sections to help you develop and implement your activities for World Drowning Prevention Day. They are summarized as:

**1. Key global messages** and background to these: Several key global messages are listed, along with some background to understand the various points made. Remember that coherent messaging is one of the most powerful things that can be done to advance an issue within public and political agendas. The drowning prevention field is best served by all its proponents coalescing around the same set of messages.

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**2. Adapting messages** to your context: This is a guidance document developed at the global level. Most organizations using this guidance will be focused on influencing their local stakeholders. This section provides guidance around adapting messaging to make it have an impact in your local setting – look to the examples provided to find inspiration on how to be effective in reaching your local audiences.

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**3. Planning activities** around WDPD: This section gives guidance and ideas on planning activities for World Drowning Prevention Day. As with the section on adapting messages to your context, keep in mind that this is global guidance and will need to be adapted to make most sense for your local context. Irrespective of how you adapt your activities to your local setting; - whether your “local setting” means working within a national governmental authority, or within a region of a country, - remember powerful progress can be made to advance drowning prevention, with coherent messaging. So, however you decide to plan your activities at the local level, make sure you are drawing upon the same set of key global messages to make your point.

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## 1. Key Global Messages

Advancing drowning prevention requires that political actors, civil society, academia, and those in a position to fund drowning prevention interventions and action, see that there is a large problem for which practical solutions exist. Convincing stakeholders that this is the case is far easier if people involved in promoting drowning prevention, and the necessity and opportunity for action, are saying the same things.

While it will also be necessary to develop local messages, and not all these global messages will be relevant or appropriate for your activities, here are key global messages the world drowning prevention community should collectively be focusing on communicating:

- The first World Drowning Prevention Day will be observed on 25 July 2021.
- The day, and the UN Resolution that proclaimed it, offer a unique opportunity to draw attention to the issue of drowning prevention, and galvanise action to save more lives.
- Globally, an estimated 236,000 lives lost to drowning every year, according to WHO estimates. Almost 650 every day, 26 every hour. A silent epidemic of preventable deaths.
- Drowning is an issue that affects every nation of the world.
- Anyone can drown, no one should.
- Every drowning is preventable.
- We can all take action to end drowning.

### Background to Key Global Messages

#### **Globally, drowning claims the lives of an estimated 236,000 lives annually**

According to WHO estimates (2019), 236,000 lives are lost to drowning every year. This is an under-estimate since it does not include lives lost to drowning from transport related accidents or flood-related drowning deaths.

#### **Anyone can drown, no one should**

This is the recommended slogan for World Drowning Prevention Day. Water is an integral part of our lives. It gives us life, but it can also take it away. While no one is immune, the stark differences between drowning rates in the highest risk countries and lowest risk countries show that drowning is not inevitable. Structural measures can be put in place, and programmes to prevent drowning can be implemented. Currently over 90% of global drowning occurs in low- and middle-income countries, so there is clearly a great deal of work to be done in these countries to prevent drowning. But in high-income countries drowning rates among certain age groups, and particularly among ethnic groups, are also very high and need attention. Ensure that you impress on the stakeholders you engage with during World Drowning Prevention Day that, whatever the nature of drowning is in your setting, it doesn't need to be that way.



## Every drowning is preventable

Solutions exist. WHO has laid out evidence-based solutions to prevent drowning, and provided detailed [implementation guidance](#) for these. While the implementation of these will vary by context, it is important that the global drowning prevention community is consistent and coherent in articulating the following six interventions that can be implemented to prevent drowning:

1. [Installing barriers controlling access to water;](#)
2. [Providing safe places away from water for pre-school children, with capable childcare;](#)
3. [Teaching basic swimming, water safety and safe rescue skills, including to school-age children;](#)
4. [Training bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation;](#)
5. [Setting and enforcing safe boating, shipping and ferry regulations, including the wearing of personal flotation devices; and](#)
6. [Building resilience and managing flood risks and other hazards.](#)

## We can all take action to end drowning

We can all do something to prevent drowning. Wherever we are. From raising awareness of the scale of the problem; recognising and promoting knowledge and awareness that tested solutions exist to prevent drowning; working with local or national government to develop drowning prevention plans and policy, volunteering with a drowning prevention, lifesaving or search and rescue organisation, knowing how to keep ourselves and our families safe when we are in, around or on the water.

To mark this first World Drowning Prevention Day, we can all make a commitment to keep ourselves, our family, and friends safe around water.





## 2. Adapting messages to your context

You, or the organisation you work for or represent, will be able to adapt key messaging on drowning prevention, to match your unique context and activities.

Examples and ideas are available from a wide range of national and international lifesaving and drowning prevention organisations. Some examples are offered below.

**Using national statistics** (where available):

### Water Safety Ireland

- An average of 115 drownings occur in Ireland every year.
- Males represent the vast majority of deaths in Irish waters – 79%.
- The majority of all drownings occur at inland water sites – 62%.
- Drownings often happen quickly and silently with 80% of drownings occurring within the home county of the victim.
- Alcohol is a factor in one third of drownings.
- The main pursuits that account for the highest number of drownings, are bathing, boating, walking and angling (recreational fishing).

See Water Safety Ireland's video message that situates Ireland's national drowning statistics to World Drowning prevention day [here](#)

**Social media resources** (example resources and messaging [here](#))

### Water Safety Ireland

National Water Safety Awareness Week takes place from June 14th – June 20th, 2021. During the week, our national campaign will communicate important water safety messages to the Irish public. Our central theme for this year is 'Better Safe, Than Sorry' – reminding us all to take necessary care when on, near or in water.

**Creating a narrative for media** (example article [here](#))

## **Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh**

Over 12,000 children (1-14 years old), die from drowning every year in Bangladesh — on average, some 32 children drown every day in the country. Notably, around 90% of these cases are not registered with police stations.

Dr Aminur Rahman, Deputy Executive Director of the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research Bangladesh (CIPRB), revealed these findings of a recent research at a press briefing on Thursday. The research was jointly conducted by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b), Johns Hopkins University (USA), and CIPRB.

The research report said around 80% of the children drowned in a pond or waterbody located within 20 metres from their home. Lack of supervision, exposure to dangerous water bodies, lack of education, and poverty are mostly to be blamed for these drownings, said Dr Rahman.

Most drownings occur between 9am to 1pm as this is the time when the wives of the houses are busy with household work, he added.

The CIPRB Deputy Executive Director continued: “Drownings are on the rise due to heavy rainfall and floods in Bangladesh. The government has taken initiatives to prevent these incidents but the ministries of education, women and children affairs, and social welfare should be involved in these programs.”

According to the research, of the total children related accidents, many were drowning incidents — 36% in April, 56% in May, 82% in June, and 86% in July.



### 3. Planning activities and events around World Drowning Prevention Day

We can all make a meaningful contribution to World Drowning Prevention Day.

Consider focusing your activity on raising the profile of drowning prevention through local or national media, or through social media. Or be creative and go another route. You should feel empowered to do what makes most sense for addressing the drowning issue within your local context – just remember to ensure you are remaining consistent with the global messaging and WHO-recommended interventions to prevent drowning given above.

Activities and events marking World Drowning Prevention Day can take place at local, national and regional levels. These may include seminars, webinars, campaign launches, and press conferences. Many could benefit from the support of leaders from drowning prevention, water safety, lifesaving or search and rescue associations with experience of engaging with policymakers and the public, and individuals considered champions for the cause.

**In-person events should consider and adhere to local and national COVID-19 protocols and restrictions.**

Ideas and suggestions for activities and events include:

#### By policy makers:

- Use the [UN Resolution](#) and WHO [Global Report on Drowning and Implementation Guide](#) documents as a basis for discussion for (virtual) high-level policy dialogues, roundtables or seminars to define or redefine a country's approach to drowning prevention;
- Launch of new strategies, plans of action or drowning prevention reports;
- The enactment or enforcement of new or existing drowning prevention / water safety relevant legislation or regulations;
- Issuance and/or revision of drowning prevention relevant national planning guidance for local administrations;
- Publication of drowning prevention / water safety research.

#### By and for the public:

- Campaigns to raise awareness of existing drowning prevention or water safety actions, and any gaps in policy or legislation;
- Dissemination of information materials related to such campaigns;
- School-based initiatives, including the provision of water safety messaging appropriate to the local context;
- Public workshops and other education-oriented activities;



- Street parades, walks or related events;
- Charity sports events or concerts;
- Ceremonies dedicated to those lost to drowning, such as remembrance ceremonies.

#### **With and through the media:**

- Press conferences;
- Radio or television interviews or televised debates or talk shows;
- Letters to the Editor in the print media;
- Special newspaper supplements;
- Social media posts – including a countdown to the day, case studies, images and facts;
- Other efforts drawing attention of the media to new drowning or water safety data, reports and initiatives.

#### **Preparing your communications**

Make your communications relevant and local – as illustrated in Section 1 “Adapting your Messaging”. Try to use national or local data, where available. Use stories to show the human impact of drowning – sensitivity is required. So, consider the impact of sharing stories of loss on those affected.

WHO will make globally relevant social media resources available on its [World Drowning Prevention Day](#) website. This site will be evolving and updated, so check frequently.

#### **Social media handle**

It is recommended that #DrowningPrevention is used as a common term for all social media posts.

Consistency enables the public and drowning prevention community to find and amplify messages.

World Health Organisation: @WHO

United Nations: @UN



## Conclusion

World Drowning Prevention Day offers a fantastic opportunity, each and every year, to draw attention to the scale, and preventability of drowning across the world. Never before has a global event of this importance been dedicated to this silent killer. This annual day, recognised through the UN Resolution on Drowning Prevention, changes that.

Through activities and events, online or in person, World Drowning Prevention Day presents an opportunity to undertake and catalyse concrete action and attention on drowning prevention and improved water safety, globally.

Together, let's make 25 July 2021 a first international opportunity to create change locally, nationally, regionally and globally on this preventable cause of mortality.

Drowning doesn't have to be an accident or fate. We know it is preventable, using solutions that are effective, cost-effective, and scalable.

Any one can drown, no one should.

### Additional Resources:

#### **UN Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention (A/RES/75/273)**

[EN] <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/273>

Also available via this link in French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Chinese

#### **About World Drowning Prevention Day (UN Observance Calendar)**

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/drowning-prevention-day>

#### **WHO World Drowning Prevention Day Information Page**

<https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-drowning-prevention-day/2021>

#### **WHO Press Release UN Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention Adopted (28 April 2021)**

<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-04-2021-governments-commit-to-accelerated-action-to-prevent-drowning>

#### **WHO Global Report on Drowning (2014)**

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/global-report-on-drowning-preventing-a-leading-killer>

#### **WHO Technical Report: Preventing drowning: an implementation guide (2017)**

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/preventing-drowning-an-implementation-guide>

