

# Water Safety Ireland

## Press Release



8<sup>th</sup> December 2020

### Christmas Swims must be different this year

This Christmas is very different from all our other Christmases we have experienced and thousands of people around the country who will want to immerse themselves in our invigorating waters must demonstrate compliance with our NPHEG guidelines. We advise Charity Fundraising Organisers to ensure that only small groups of swimmers descend upon our favourite swimming locations at any one time and that their events be spread out over the holiday period to ensure we do not have any breaches of the NPHEG Guidelines. We simply cannot have large groupings of well-meaning charity supporters converging at our favourite bathing places. Swim at known safe bathing places where there is public rescue equipment available should a swimmer get in to difficulty.

Our country has seen an explosion in the number of people involved in open water swimming since the arrival of COVID-19 and on the whole people have been compliant in terms of adhering to social distancing, wearing masks and hand hygiene. Christmas swims have grown in popularity in recent years as it is a very sociable experience as well as raising much needed funds for charities.

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 cause “cold shock” and hypothermia can set in within a short period, especially if there is a high wind chill factor, this can overwhelm the fittest of swimmers. Immediately before the swim, people should throw cold water on themselves and always ease into the water slowly introducing your body to the low temperature. If you see a person in difficulty, do not attempt a rescue for which you are not trained. Make use of nearby public rescue equipment such as a ringbuoy.

#### Charity Swim guidelines:

- People organising these swims on Christmas Day, St. Stephen’s Day or New Year’s Day must ensure full compliance with NPHEG Guidelines and that they provide comprehensive details of each event to the Irish Coast Guard and local Gardaí in advance of their event.
- 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 – if in doubt 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. No alcohol should be taken before or after the swim.
- Please use our Open Water Safety Leaflet to prepare for your swim <https://watersafety.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Open-Water-Swimming-Brochure.pdf>
- Cold water can cause cold shock and hypothermia in minutes because the temperature of the water at this time of year may be below 6° Celsius in Fresh Water and 10° Celsius in Seawater.

- Ensure that you have safe access and egress with appropriate shallow shelving beaches, steps, slipway or ladders as appropriate. People should be mindful that steps leading into the water might be dangerous due to the increased growth of algae in wintertime. Organisers must ensure that they have had the access and egress cleaned in advance of the swim to avoid slips and falls.
- Fancy dress outfits can seriously impair your ability to float – please do not wear when swimming.
- Swimmers' remaining in the water for extended periods in a gesture of bravado is not acceptable and leads to hypothermia. Our message is "**Get In, Get Out and Warm Up**", further advice at <https://watersafety.ie/open-water-swimming/>

Furthermore, thousands of people are at risk when walking by rivers, lakes and shorelines. Others are lulled into a false sense of security when visiting relatives living close to water hazards such as slurry pits, ponds, exposed drains and canals. See our Christmas survival guide to staying safe around water this holiday season.

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### **GENERAL LIFESAVING/WATER SAFETY POINTS THIS CHRISTMAS:**

1. Comply with all NPHEM Guidelines.
2. Always supervise children.
3. Never swim alone in a pool unprotected by lifeguards.
4. Avoid cold shock and hypothermia on Christmas and New Year Charity Swims.
5. Do not engage in any water-based activities after the consumption of alcohol.
6. Alcohol should not be consumed before your water safety activity.
7. Always wear a lifejacket when boating or participating in other aquatic sports.
8. Stay away from the edge when fishing from rocks or on the banks of rivers, or lakes.
9. **In an aquatic emergency call 999 or 112 and ask for the Coast Guard, always call early.**

### **Tides**

***As you walk shorelines, keep a close eye on the tidal advance and carry your mobile phone in case you are cut off.***

**On New Year's Eve we shall experience a new moon.** A new moon will increase the range of our tides causing higher and lower tides. This will expose large areas of beach and rocks which we don't see during neap tides. 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 phone and call 112 if required. All those swimming, boating, surfing, or diving should be aware of stronger tidal streams around our coast over the Christmas period. Swimmers need to be aware of the risks rip currents will pose on our beaches. The public are encouraged to access tidal information through newspapers and online.

### **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, 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. For more, visit [www.flooding.ie](http://www.flooding.ie).

### **Ice**

Should we experience icy conditions, 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.

### **What should I do when I hear a Flood Warning?**

1. LISTEN TO THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL RADIO FOR MET EIREANN UPDATES AND WARNINGS.
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.
6. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE WARM CLOTHES, FOOD, DRINK, A TORCH, MOBILE PHONE 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, RADIO OR ONLINE.

### **Personal Safety During Flooding**

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 OR 999 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 SWEEPED 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.

### **Ice Safety Tips to Avoid Danger**

1. AVOID GOING OUT ON ICE AND DISCOURAGE OTHERS FROM DOING SO.
2. RESCUING ANOTHER PERSON FROM ICE CAN BE DANGEROUS. THE SAFEST WAY TO PERFORM A RESCUE IS FROM SHORE. IF POSSIBLE DO NOT ATTEMPT A RESCUE BY GOING ONTO ICE.
3. CALL FOR HELP AT 999 OR 112 AND ASK FOR THE EMERGENCY SERVICES. GIVE YOUR PRECISE LOCATION, EIRCODE, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN DIFFICULTY AND ANY CONSPICUOUS BUILDING OR LANDMARK NEARBY.
4. 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.
5. 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. THIS WILL HELP KEEP THE CASUALTY AFLOAT UNTIL ASSISTANCE ARRIVES.
6. INSTRUCT THE CASUALTY TO KEEP STILL TO MAINTAIN THEIR HEAT AND ENERGY;
7. THROUGHOUT YOUR RESCUE KEEP OFF THE ICE, AND CONTINUE TO REASSURE THE CASUALTY, KEEPING THEM TALKING UNTIL HELP ARRIVES.
8. 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).
9. WHEN NEAR THE BREAK, LIE DOWN TO DISTRIBUTE YOUR WEIGHT AND SLOWLY CRAWL TOWARD THE HOLE.
10. REMAINING LOW, EXTEND OR THROW YOUR EMERGENCY RESCUE DEVICE (POLE, ROPE, LINE OR BRANCH) TO THE PERSON.
11. HAVE THE PERSON KICK WHILE YOU PULL THEM OUT.
12. MOVE THE PERSON TO A SAFE POSITION ON SHORE OR WHERE YOU ARE SURE THE ICE IS THICK.
13. ALL CASUALTIES SHOULD BE TAKEN TO HOSPITAL EVEN IF THEY APPEAR TO BE UNAFFECTED BY THEIR ORDEAL AS THEY WILL BE SUFFERING FROM HYPOTHERMIA.
14. NEVER GO OUT ON ICE ALONE AND ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT.

### **If you get into trouble on ice and you're by yourself**

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 TO 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.