



# Water safety training module: participant hand-out

This hand-out, designed to be used as a reference tool, is for participants in Water Safety trainings. The information it contains is a selection of Girlguiding policies and guidance. For further information please visit [www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual).

Please make sure to always check *the Girlguiding website* online for the most up-to-date information and guidance.

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## Drowning

Drowning is death from asphyxia caused by immersion in water.

### Primary drowning

Primary drowning occurs when a person is unable to breathe because their airway is submerged in water or another liquid. The person cannot breathe, gasps for air but instead inhales fluid into the lungs. A lack of oxygen may stop the heart from working, and the brain cannot survive for long without oxygen. A person will become unconscious after a short time. This can lead to brain damage or death in as little as four to six minutes.

### Secondary drowning

Secondary drowning is when liquid enters the lungs, often due to a near drowning experience. Later the fluid produced in the lungs to combat the water and any organisms or chemicals in it accumulates and prevents the lungs from working.

This can happen some hours after contact with water, and can occur even when only small quantities of liquid have entered the lungs.

Casualties who have suffered near drowning are therefore recommended to seek medical advice.

### Dry drowning

Dry drowning often occurs due to immersion in cold water. Muscles spasms block the airway and prevent the person from breathing. No water enters the lungs.

## The Water Safety Code

Stay safe in and around the water by following the Water Safety Code (adapted from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents).

- Keep away from dangers
- Follow safety advice
- Don't go alone
- Learn how to help

# Environmental hazards

## Blue-green algae

Search *the Girlguiding website* for 'blue-green algae'.

### Description

Blue-green algae are bacterial organisms that can be found in ponds, lakes and other inland water, or in the sea during summer. They can be identified by their distinctive blue-green colour.

### Symptoms

The symptoms are usually mild but in some cases can be severe. Coming into contact with blue green algae can cause any, or all, of the following symptoms in humans:

- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- skin rashes
- eye irritation
- muscle or joint pain.

### What to do

If you experience any of these symptoms consult your doctor and state that you have taken part in water sports.

## Leptospirosis and Weil's disease

Search *the Girlguiding website* for 'Weil's disease'.

Leptospirosis and Weil's disease are extremely rare but can be caught by anyone participating in water sports, so it is worth being aware of the symptoms and methods of prevention.

### How the infection is spread

Leptospirosis is a bacteria carried by animals, which can survive for days or even weeks in moist conditions such as freshwater streams, rivers, lakes etc. Bacteria can enter through broken skin or via the eyes, nose or mouth.

### Methods of prevention

- Avoid swimming in suspect water (ie where there is pollution, particularly from farmland with livestock).
- Cover any broken skin with waterproof plasters.
- Use appropriate footwear to avoid cuts to the feet.
- Shower as soon as you can after water activities.

### Symptoms

The incubation period is 2 to 12 days. Symptoms are usually flu-like (eg fever, headache and back pain) which subside in two to three weeks. In some cases leptospirosis can develop into Weil's disease, which is a more serious illness and must be treated swiftly.

If you think that you may have been infected, visit your doctor and say that you participate in water sports and think that there may be a risk of leptospirosis.

Further information can be found at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).

## Giant hogweed

Giant hogweed is a large plant that can grow up to 5 metres tall, and can be found near rivers and streams. It is not widespread within the UK.

Giant hogweed sap can cause severe burns when it comes into contact with skin, and makes skin very sensitive to sunlight. This can result in blisters and long-lasting scars. The sap is found in all parts of the plant - leaves, flowers, roots, stems and seeds.

If someone touches a giant hogweed plant, wash the affected area with soap and cold water, then cover it and keep away from sunlight for at least 48 hours. Rinse eyes immediately if they have come into contact with the sap. If problems persist, especially in response to sunlight, seek medical advice.

## Wildlife

Weever fish and jellyfish stings (taken from *Health Matters*, order code 6454)

The weever fish is a small fish with venomous spines on its back. If you step on one, the sting can be very painful. Place the affected area in water as hot as is comfortable (making sure you test the water first so you do not scald the person who has been stung), and seek medical advice.

If someone has been stung by a jellyfish, do not rub the affected area as this will make the pain worse. Lightly spray the area with seawater and, if possible, apply a cold compress or ice. Remove stingers by rinsing with sea water or drawing the edge of a credit card across them - do not use tweezers. Don't rinse with fresh water as this may activate more stingers.

Also seek medical advice if:

- an individual continues to have considerable pain from jellyfish or weever fish stings
- if someone has been stung by something at the beach and you do not know what it was.

## Water activities and planning safe water activities

Search *the Girlguiding website* for 'water activities'

### Girlguiding water classification

Search *the Girlguiding website* for 'water classification'

The local outdoor activities adviser classifies stretches of water that are safe and suitable for boating activities according to their degree of difficulty.

#### Unclassified

This classification is given to water such as ornamental or shallow lakes, where rowing boats, pedalos, etc can be hired.

#### Inland water

Girlguiding classifies sheltered inland waters and slow-moving rivers as 'Inland 1'.

Rivers with frequent rapids or regular waves that would be described as an easy course are classified as 'Inland 2'.

#### Tidal water

Girlguiding classifies sheltered tidal water as 'Sea 1'. Sea up to 1 mile offshore (but excluding more dangerous waters inshore) and more sheltered parts of estuaries are classified as 'Sea 2'.

#### Water that is not classified

Activities may take place on water that is not classified without either the leader or participants holding a qualification, provided the conditions are safe on the day of the activity and adequate supervision is provided. If instruction is given, the instructor must hold the relevant qualification (see each boating activity on *the Girlguiding website*).

One adult in the group (not necessarily the activity leader) must:

- know safe methods for rescue from water
- know how to prevent and treat hypothermia
- be able to perform cardio-pulmonary resuscitation.

### Buoyancy aids and life jackets

Search *the Girlguiding website* for 'life jackets'.

There are two main types of personal floatation devices:

- buoyancy aids, which keep the user afloat while allowing them full movement
- life jackets, which keep the user afloat in an upright position, keeping their head out of the water even if they fall unconscious.

In conjunction with the recommendations of the Royal Yachting Association, personal floatation devices must be worn:

- if the participant is a non-swimmer

- if the activity instructor deems it necessary
- when abandoning ship
- if the participant feels they want to wear one.

A life jacket may be worn in place of a buoyancy aid but not vice versa. Buoyancy aids and life jackets must be the right size for the participant and worn in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and the classification of water.

Personal floatation devices come in different buoyancy levels. The level participants require will depend on the nature of the activity, weather conditions and location. Follow the guidance of a qualified activity instructor for the required buoyancy level.

To view the type of floatation device required for specific activities, search *the Girlguiding website* for 'life jackets'. All buoyancy aids and life jackets manufactured after 1995 are tested to the European Community (EC) Directive on Life Jackets and Buoyancy Aids, and have a CE mark on the label. Where an EC standard is specified, a higher standard may be substituted.

## Swimming guidance

### Swimming in open water (from *the Girlguiding website*)

#### Description

This activity refers to taking young members swimming in the sea, lakes and other open water.

#### Forms

An Information and Consent for Event/Activity form is required to participate in this activity. Search [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk) for 'consent form'.

#### Who can participate?

Open to all. Participants do not have to be able to swim unaided as long as the appropriate swimming aids are used.

Guides may go swimming without a leader, provided:

- they are accompanied by a responsible adult who has been approved by the leader
- they have permission from their leader
- appropriate lifeguard cover is available
- they use the buddy system (swim in pairs or small groups for safety).

Rangers may go swimming without an adult, provided:

- they have permission from their leader
- appropriate lifeguard cover is available
- they use the buddy system (swimming in pairs or small groups for safety).

#### Ratio of adults to girls

The ratio for swimming in open-water is one adult to every five girls with a minimum of two adults for all sections (except Rangers, for whom adult helpers are not applicable).

There must be enough adult helpers to supervise and maintain the appropriate ratio for the section at all times.

#### Regulations

- The leader must ensure that all participants under 18 have written permission to take part from an adult with parental responsibility.
- The local commissioner must be informed that the activity is taking place.
- Carry out a risk assessment for the aspects of the activity you are responsible for. More information on risk assessments is available on *the Girlguiding website*.

#### The Leader must do the following.

- Ensure that safety rules and alarm signals have been explained to the participants.
- Be satisfied that everyone understands the need for instructions to be obeyed immediately.
- Follow the guidelines in the Water Safety Code and ensure that the adult helpers are familiar with them. You can read the full Water Safety Code at [www.rospa.com/leisure-safety/water/advice/children-young-people](http://www.rospa.com/leisure-safety/water/advice/children-young-people)

- Ensure that the water is suitable for swimming, seeking advice if necessary.
- Arrange appropriate lifeguard cover and sufficient responsible adult helpers based on the number of swimmers and their section, the ability of the participants and the type of water.
- Discuss relevant responsibilities with the lifeguard(s) and adult helpers.
- Provide the lifeguard(s) and responsible adult helpers with safety equipment, or ensure that it is provided.
- Decide on the day, with the lifeguard(s), whether conditions are safe for swimming.

## **Instructor qualifications**

### **Instructors**

If receiving instruction in inland open water, the instructor should hold the Royal Life Saving Society's (RLSS) Aquatic Rescue Test for Outdoor Activity Supervisors.

### **Lifeguards**

A lifeguard must:

- be at least 16 years old
- hold an appropriate and current lifeguarding qualification
- stay on the alert and be capable of making a rescue if necessary
- carry a whistle and wear appropriate footwear.

## **Lifeguard qualifications**

### **Beaches (non-patrolled and patrolled)**

Lifeguards must hold one of the following:

- RLSS UK National Beach Lifeguard Qualification (NBLQ)
- Surf Life Saving GB National Rescue Standard (NaRS) Beach Lifeguard.

### **Inland open water**

In inland open water a minimum of the RLSS UK Survive and Save (Stillwater) qualification must be held.

### **Finding a lifeguard**

Contact your local swimming club, the RLSS or the Swimming Teachers' Association (STA) for information on booking a lifeguard.

## **Useful information**

Water should be inspected for signs of visible pollution, for example rubbish, blue-green algae or chemicals.

The Leader should ensure that each participant (or her parent if the participant is under 18 years old) is aware of the dangers and symptoms of Weil's disease and knows what action to take if leptospirosis infection is suspected. On the day of the activity, participants should be advised to cover cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters.

### **A responsible adult helper should:**

- remain alert throughout the activity
- check numbers frequently
- call swimmers out of the water if necessary
- inform the lifeguard(s) if anyone is in difficulty.

### **Swimmers must:**

- be paired according to ability, stay in these pairs and be responsible for watching each other (the 'buddy' system)
- enter unheated water gradually and come out of the water if they start to get cold.

It is advisable for swimmers to wear protective non-slip footwear: even sand can hide hazardous objects and creatures.

Lifeguards must be satisfied that the conditions on the day are suitable for safe swimming, taking into account:

- local advice
- weather conditions

- the location and temperature of the water (water below 12°C/54°F is too cold for swimming)
- the age, ability and state of health of the swimmers
- natural hazards, for example weeds, rocks, state of the tide and any visible pollution (chemical or rubbish).

## Days out at the beach

(Taken from *Health Matters*, order code 6454)

On hot summer days beaches are very inviting, but they do pose many dangers. Before you go, research your beach well. The Marine Conservation Society's website has helpful information about all UK beaches: [www.goodbeachguide.co.uk](http://www.goodbeachguide.co.uk).

- Is the beach patrolled by lifeguards? Swim only between the red-and-yellow flags, which mean lifeguards are on patrol in the area. Red flags indicate that it is dangerous to swim or bathe. Quartered black and white flags indicate that the area is zoned for boards and surf craft, and is not safe for swimmers or bathers.
- Are there any dangers such as rip tides, sandbanks or cliffs?
- How clean is the water? Look out for a Blue Flag on a beach or marina. It indicates that the water and beach or marina meet the standards set by the Foundation for Environmental Education.
- Is there any dangerous debris/litter on the sand?
- Check tide times.
- Check the depth of the water and how steeply the seabed shelves.
- Are there toilets and hand-washing facilities?

Consider the following on the day.

- It is important that a clearly marked base is set up as children can easily become disorientated on the beach, and getting lost can be traumatic for both the child and the leaders. Think of ways in which group members can stand out if they are without their uniforms, such as wearing matching sun hats or tying coloured ribbons to everyone's swimming costume straps.
- Set clear boundaries and ground rules, for example Rainbows and younger Brownies can paddle only with a leader.
- Buddy the girls and ensure the younger ones in particular are closely supervised - allocate a small group to each leader.
- Girls should wash their hands frequently and before eating.

## The dangers of the sea

### Tides

The tide can come in surprisingly quickly. Many lifeboat and lifeguard rescues involve people being stranded by the tide. Find out about the tides from the local tourist information office or from [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) > Weather > Coast and sea > Tide tables. Keep a lookout for the tide's direction and be aware of how fast the water is coming in, especially if you are playing in rock pools.

### Waves

Watch out for waves, especially if you have small children. Even a small wave can knock a child over. Dumping waves are especially dangerous - they break with great force in shallow water and occur during low tide.

### Rip tides

Rip tides are strong currents that can quickly take swimmers from shallow water to water that is beyond their depth. Signs of a rip include discoloured, brown water (caused by sand being stirred up from the seabed), foam on the water's surface and debris floating out to sea. If you are caught in a rip, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution's advice is as follows.

- Stay calm. If you can stand, wade. Do not swim.
- Keep hold of your board or inflatable to help you float.
- Raise your hand and shout for help.
- Never try to swim directly against the rip or you will get exhausted.
- Swim parallel to the beach until free of the rip, then make for shore.

Share this information with Guides or Rangers, particularly if they are going to the beach without adults.

# First aid

## Hypothermia

(Taken from *Health Matters*, order code 6454)

Hypothermia develops when body temperature falls below 35°C (95°F). The effects vary depending on the speed at which the temperature drops and the level to which it falls. The person will be cold and shivering, and may be quiet or irrational and show character changes. If normal shivering stops medical attention must be sought immediately. Breathing may be slow and weak. In cool conditions you should be aware of any group member who is unusually quiet or tetchy - this could be the onset of the effects of cold and if one group member is suffering the effects, there is a good chance that others could be on the verge too. Find shelter, rest, and warm the individual by giving her extra clothing, a sleeping bag and/or survival bag, and assess the severity of the condition. An individual may be more susceptible to the effects of the cold if she has recently been ill or has not eaten enough.

## Useful links

\*These organisations also offer nationally recognised water safety training courses

BBC Weather tide timetables

[www.bbc.co.uk/weather/coast\\_and\\_sea/tide\\_tables](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/coast_and_sea/tide_tables)

British Swimming and The Amateur Swimming Association

[www.britishswimming.org/](http://www.britishswimming.org/)

Coastguard Agency

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency)

Drowning Prevention Week

[drowningpreventionweek.org.uk/](http://drowningpreventionweek.org.uk/)

Go Swimming Poolfinder

[www.swimming.org/poolfinder](http://www.swimming.org/poolfinder)

Good Beach Guide - Information from the Marine Conservation Society on water quality and lifeguarded beaches across the UK

[www.goodbeachguide.co.uk/](http://www.goodbeachguide.co.uk/)

International Life Saving Federation

<http://ilsf.org/>

National Water Safety Forum

[www.nationalbeachsafety.org.uk/](http://www.nationalbeachsafety.org.uk/)

NHS

[www.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhs.uk/)

Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) UK\*

[www.rlss.org.uk/](http://www.rlss.org.uk/)

Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)\*

<http://rnli.org/Pages/Default.aspx>

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

[www.rospace.com/leisuresafety/adviceandinformation/watersafety/](http://www.rospace.com/leisuresafety/adviceandinformation/watersafety/)

World Health Organization (WHO) information on drowning

[www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/diseases/drowning/en/](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/drowning/en/)



## Girlguiding resources

Girlguiding Walking Scheme  
[www.girlguidingshop.co.uk](http://www.girlguidingshop.co.uk)

General requirements for water activities  
Search the Girlguiding website for 'water activities'

*Activity finder* for guidance on specific activities  
<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/our-badges-and-activities/activity-finder/>

Top ten tips for adventurous activities  
Search *the Girlguiding website* for 'risk assessment'

Best practice for running activities  
Search *the Girlguiding website* for 'best practice'

## Resources for running programme for young members around water safety

RNLI Shore Thing  
<http://rnli.org/shorething/Pages/default.aspx>

Canal and River Trust - Canal and River Explorers  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers>

## Further training

### Within Girlguiding

1st Response - basic first aid course  
Search [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

Walking Scheme - instruct and supervise members on walks and hikes  
Search [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

Narrowboating Scheme - instruct and supervise Girlguiding members doing activities on Narrowboats  
Search [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

### External

British Canoe Union (BCU) coaching qualifications  
[www.canoe-england.org.uk/coaching](http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/coaching)



# Work pages









## Environmental hazards

Complete this table of different environmental hazards.

Hazard	Where are you likely to find it?	What does it look like?	What is the result of coming into contact with it?	What action should be taken for someone affected?

## Flags and signs

Write what each sign and flag in the second column are for. Your trainer should provide you with a sheet to check your answers against. If you want to identify the ones in the third column too you can. Ask your trainer for the answers.

Definition	Sign	Examples
		
		
		
		

Definition	Sign	How they appear on a beach information sign
	