

Over 70% of children who drowned could not swim and were not using flotation devices

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A recent study analyses cases of drowning attended to in 21 hospitals in Spain during the summers of 2009 and 2010. 60% of the victims were younger than six years old and more than 70% did not know how to swim and were not using flotation devices when they drowned. Furthermore, in eight in every ten cases their carers admitted to having supervised them less attentively.

Drowning is the second most common global cause of deaths due to unintentional injuries in children from one to fourteen years old. As such, a team of professionals from Hospital Sant Joan de Déu in Barcelona coordinated a study to find out the frequency of drowning in paediatric [emergency services](#) in 21 hospitals across Spain.

Between June and September in 2009 and 2010 the participating centres saw a total of 53 children who had drowning symptoms. 64% were under the age of six, 71.7% did not know how to swim and 97% were not wearing flotation devices at the time of the accident.

The results also reveal that in six out of ten cases, the child was in a private pool and in eight out of ten their carers had left them alone briefly or had stopped supervising as vigilantly.

The paper, published in the journal *Anales de Pediatría*, concludes that 10% of children who drowned died or suffered after-effects. The rest recovered because their families administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation at the site of the incident.

"Incidents of drowning carry a very high mortality rate and it is essential to maximise the precautions taken and supervision of children in [swimming pools](#), especially in the case of children below six years old, who form one of the groups most at risk," Fernando Panzino, from the [emergency department](#) of the Catalan [hospital](#) and the leading author of the study, explains to SINC.

Panzino also stresses "the necessity for the general population to learn techniques to help the victim because early application of CPR is essential for victims' prognosis and survival."

As for prevention, the experts attest that effective supervision could have avoided 90% of the deaths. However, although having swimming classes led to an 88% reduction in the risk to those between one and four years old, such a strategy must not replace [supervision](#), adequate fencing of pools and flotation systems.

Children and men most at risk

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), drowning is defined as the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid, with outcomes classified as death, morbidity and no morbidity.

The WHO believes that drowning is the third leading global cause of [death](#) due to unintentional traumatism, comprising 7% of deaths linked to traumatisms.

In fact, it is calculated that 388,000 people die by drowning throughout the world each year. The risk of drowning is higher in children, men and people with easy access to water.

In Spain there are an estimated 1.5 incidents of [drowning](#) per 100,000

inhabitants, "although until now there have been no state multi-centre studies on the child population," notes Panzino.

For authorities, all prevention strategies should include engineering methods to help eliminate danger, legislation to enforce preventive measures and reduce exposure, teaching people and communities to make them more aware of the risk and know how to react, and prioritising public health initiatives to study preventive actions.

More information: F. Panzino, J.M. Quintillá, C. Luaces y J. Pou. "Ahogamientos por inmersión no intencional. Análisis de las circunstancias y perfil epidemiológico de las víctimas atendidas en 21 servicios de urgencias españoles". *Anales de Pediatría* 2013;78(3):178-184.

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