

# When the weather's warm and sunny it's tempting to go for a splash - but would you know what to do if you got into trouble in the water?

Water may look safe, but it can be a dangerous environment. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) says that children should always go swimming with an adult, not by themselves.

Swimming pools are the best places to learn and enjoy water activities: They are temperature controlled, have safety procedures in place such as signposting and lifeguards and many offer buoyancy supports.

Some people like to swim in the sea (at the beach) or choose to swim in rivers/canals because it's 'free'.

## Here are some important tips from the ROSPA about the dangers of open waters:

### It is very cold....brrrr

The water may seem a great place to cool off but it is much colder than you think. You may swim well in a warm indoor pool, but that does not mean that you will be able to swim in cold water outside.

People who drown are not necessarily poor swimmers. The combination of hot weather and cold water can render anyone incapable. Anything below 15°C is defined as cold water and can seriously affect your breathing and movement, so the risk is significant most of the year. Average UK and Ireland sea temperatures are just 12°C. Rivers such as **the Thames** are colder - even in the summer!

Cold-water shock causes the blood vessels in the skin to close, which increases the resistance of blood flow and an involuntary gasp for air. The heart rate is increased and blood pressure goes up. Breathing rates can change uncontrollably (as much as tenfold). All these responses contribute to panic, increasing the chances of inhaling water into the lungs.

### Pollution...yuck

What may appear to be a beautiful body of water, could be hiding many dangers below the surface: discarded rubbish; shopping trolleys; broken glass; chemical waste...in other words - not just fish!

Toxic bacteria, such as e-coli, can make people violently ill or even become life-threatening.

There are close to 1500 rivers in the UK, but just two stretches have been officially approved as swimming destinations - and even these are currently too polluted to use safely. (NewScientist publication March 2023)

### Unexpected surprises...urgh

Unlike swimming pools where the depth of the water is signposted, knowing a 'safe' depth in a river is notoriously difficult to judge. Bathing in shallow water can change dramatically and someone can suddenly find themselves in much deeper water, which can lead to panic.

Many riverbeds are slippery and have weeds which swimmers may be tangled by. Riverbanks can also be steep and slimy making it difficult to get out.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/47797851>  
WATCH: Emergency services give tips on staying safe in and around water

### Under currents...woah

The current may appear slow and calm on the surface but it can be very different below the surface. Water below the surface can be very turbulent and extremely dangerous - even for the strongest of swimmers!

What Mark Pussey (crew member at RNLI Chiswick) said about the Thames, "...it's an incredibly dangerous river to find yourself in - either on purpose or accidentally. The water here is brackish. It's very muddy and silty and people can get trapped in that mud."