

Foreign holiday drowning deaths

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Introduction

The European Child Safety Alliance 2008 report Protecting Children and Youths in Water Recreation: Safety Guidelines for Service Providers states that 70% of European tourists spend their holidays at a waterside location and that tourists have a higher rate of injury and death than the standard population (1). Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs reported that 130 Irish citizens died while abroad in 2007, including at least 10 persons who drowned (2). This is neither an Irish or European problem alone, RoSPA reports that in the period 2000 to 2005, 475 British tourists drowned on holiday (3). In Australia, 4.7% of non-boat drowning deaths occur among international tourists and drowning causes 15% of injury deaths among US citizens travelling abroad annually (4).

Objectives

The author analysed how and why Irish residents appear to drown while on holiday abroad and based on his conclusions devised a set of holiday water safety guidelines for public use.

Methods

General literature on holiday deaths was collected via an online search using the keywords 'holiday death' and 'holiday drowning'. Articles and reports were printed off and assessed for their relevance to the questions being studied. Using a news cutting service Irish newspapers, especially local papers, from 2000 to 2008 were sifted for relevant news reports and specific details isolated and recorded. Lifesaving websites were scanned for holiday water safety advice.

Discussion

The study arrived at 10 general conclusions including tourists are 15 times more likely to drown than local residents; children under 15 years of age are likely to drown in a swimming pool; individuals over 15 years of age are likely to drown in open water and many of those who died did so within a short time of arriving at their holiday destination. It was concluded that the majority of young deaths arise from parents or the youths themselves holding false safety assumptions. Eight 'Dangerous Assumptions' are listed including being able to swim protects children from drowning and the presence of a lifeguard removes the need for the careful supervision of children. As there are no EU wide safety laws parents must accept full responsibility for their children's safety. Under the title of 'Take The Time To Check It Out', 40 safety guidelines for parents were identified for four specific areas – pool, beach, people and equipment. An Irish Lifesaving Foundation water safety leaflet, based on this study, and titled Water Safety Holiday Advice is available for download on its website www.lifesavingfoundation.ie.

Conclusion

When people go on holiday, along with their luggage, they also bring with them a set of safety assumptions. The only way members of the public can be certain about their own safety and the safety of their children is to check out the swimming pool, the beach, the people who appear to have a safety role and the play equipment used beforehand.

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(1) Norman N. And Vincenten J. Protecting Children and Youths in Water Recreation: Safety Guidelines for Service Providers. Amsterdam: European Child Safety Alliance; Eurosafe; 2008. http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/serv_sectors/docs/water_recreation_en.pdf

(2) Replies to Irish Parliamentary Questions No. 103 and 104 for 30/04/2008

(3) RoSPA Water safety Information, June 2007

(4) Cortes Leslie M. et al, Recommendations for Water Safety and Drowning Prevention for Travellers, Journal of Travel Medicine, Vol 13, Issue 1, 2006, pp. 21–34

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