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## Portable pools and the SwimSafe Thailand experience

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### Background

In a middle income country where more than 2,600 children die annually from drowning, very few Thai children ever learn how to swim (1). Based on the knowledge that survival swimming skills and knowledge enable children to protect themselves and their peers from drowning (2), SwimSafe Thailand is trialling the use of portable pools as a means of bringing survival swimming lessons to children aged 6–12 years in both urban and rural Thailand. SwimSafe Thailand is a partnership between The Alliance for Safe Children, the College of Public Health Sciences at Chulalongkorn University, Royal Life Saving Society – Australia and the Thai Life Saving Society. It is supported by the Australia–Thailand Institute and fundraising with the Bangkok Pattana School Tiger sharks swim team.

SwimSafe Thailand joins programs in Bangladesh and Vietnam in forming a regional SwimSafe network with diverse experience in implementing child drowning interventions in Asia. The aims are: 1) To determine the effectiveness of portable swimming pools as a strategy to provide survival swimming training to Thai children aged 6–12; 2) To trial the SwimSafe Thailand curriculum developed to fit the geographic environment and cultural needs of Thailand; 3) To train Thai nationals as survival swimming instructors; 4) To ensure both the portable pools model and the curriculum meet the needs of urban and rural environments; 5) To foster communities' awareness of the drowning issue and improve capacity to deliver survival swimming programs; and 6) To consider the SwimSafe Thailand model as a component of a regional approach to child drowning prevention

### Implementation

SwimSafe Thailand works at the community level to engage individual communities in the delivery of a program which develops their own awareness, skills and capacity to address the problem of child drowning. SwimSafe currently works with seven schools across three provinces in Thailand; in Samut Prakan in urban Bangkok and rural Chiang Rai and Ayuthaya provinces. Portable pools have been installed at primary schools in each location. Teachers are trained as survival swimming instructors to deliver classes using a curriculum adapted from SwimSafe programs in Bangladesh and Vietnam. The portable pools provide a low-technology facility for swim training in a clean and safe environment – important for gaining family and community support in Thailand. Fostering community ownership of the program and the pool resource is an ongoing priority.

The program has trained 15 instructors and reached more than 400 children in Thailand to date. Close monitoring of swim classes, water quality and the durability of the portable pool structure is ongoing and data is collected on test results from each component of the curricula.

A series of lessons have been learnt to date about the complexities of accessing Thai communities; cultural attitudes towards teaching Thai children to swim; identifying appropriate local staff and providing them support to deliver the program, as well as use of the portable pools themselves.

As an operational research project using a community participatory approach, SwimSafe Thailand is providing valuable evidence and insights to assess the appropriateness of this survival swimming intervention as a means of preventing drowning in the Thai context. The effectiveness of portable swimming pools in providing survival swimming training to Thai children continues to be explored.

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