WATER & OUTDOORS

Hypothermia & cold-water emergencies

Cold shock can impair breathing before hypothermia develops. Plan for the water temperature, even on a warm day.

> Cold-water immersion or suspected hypothermia is an emergency. Call 911 and follow dispatcher instructions.

Prepare before going near water

- Wear a properly fitted life jacket. Have everyone wear theirs before boarding or approaching exposed water access.
- Check the forecast, water conditions and route. Carry a waterproof means of calling for help and tell someone your return time.
- Bring dry layers and protection appropriate to the water temperature. Do not rely on a chart to predict anyone's survival time.

If you enter cold water

- Keep your airway above water, use your flotation and work to regain control of breathing. Sudden gasping can become a drowning emergency.
- Stay with a floating boat when possible. Avoid unnecessary swimming; consider distance, current, conditions and flotation before trying to reach safety.
- Use a whistle, light or communication device to attract help. Do not remove a life jacket to make swimming easier.

Help without becoming another casualty

- Call 911. Give the entry point, last seen location, number of people and visible landmarks.
- Stay on secure ground. Offer a reachable flotation aid from safety if possible; do not enter cold water for an untrained rescue.
- Once the person is out, move to shelter, remove wet clothing and cover them with dry layers. Handle a severely cold person gently.

Recognize a medical emergency

- Confusion, slurred speech, fumbling, unusual exhaustion or drowsiness can indicate hypothermia; shivering may also be present.
- Get emergency medical help. Do not give drinks to anyone drowsy, unconscious or unable to swallow safely.
- If unresponsive and not breathing normally, tell the dispatcher immediately and follow CPR and AED directions. Protect against further cooling.

Sources & further guidance

National Weather Service - cold-water hazards | www.weather.gov
CDC - preventing hypothermia | www.cdc.gov