

DH releases Hong Kong Drowning Report

The Department of Health (DH) today (September 12) released the Hong Kong Drowning Report, which is the first comprehensive study to assess the epidemiology of unintentional drowning injuries in Hong Kong. The report analyses and gives an account of the size and significance of drowning, and offers recommendations to prevent drowning in the community. It is also hoped that the report can raise awareness of safety around water among the public and relevant stakeholders for better prevention of drowning.

"Locally, although the number of deaths due to drowning is small as compared with other major types of injuries, the fatality rate is exceptionally high," a spokesman for the DH said.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Action Plan to Strengthen Prevention of Unintentional Injuries in Hong Kong published in 2015, the DH conducted a review of 193 records of unintentional drowning deaths in Hong Kong registered by the Coroner's Court during the 2012 to 2016 period with an aim of understanding the demographic characteristics and risk factors contributing to drowning incidents so as to formulate appropriate preventive actions.

The study revealed that the cases involved 142 males and 51 females, aged 5 to 90, with the median age being 57. Swimming (46.1 per cent) and snorkelling and diving (5.2 per cent) accounted for around half of the drowning cases. Of note, the study highlighted other circumstances with risk of drowning that might have been overlooked, such as accidental immersion (21.8 per cent), water-based/land-based fishing (7.3 per cent) and domestic activities such as bathing and washing (6.7 per cent).

In addition, the study identified risky behaviours in regard to drowning victims who:

1. Performed water activities under adverse weather conditions;
2. Performed water activities alone;
3. Swam in the absence of a lifeguard;
4. Consumed alcohol before water activities; and
5. Took illicit drugs before water activities.

With regard to the outcomes of the report, 15 recommendations to prevent drowning are tailored for the general public and persons engaging in water activities with an aim of protecting their own safety and that of their families and travel companions.

The general public should take heed of the following measures:

- Enhance your knowledge and skills on water safety:

1. Learn how to swim; and

2. Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation for drowning victims, which is different to that for cases of cardiac arrest.

- Prevent domestic drowning

3. Know the hazards. Domestic drowning hazards can be subtle, as even a bucket of water can cause drowning. Be aware of potential risks;

4. Be alert. If any member of the family is prone to falling or fainting, their situation can result in drowning; and

5. Pay attention to family members at home, in particular children, elderly persons and family members who need special care.

Persons engaging in water activities should take heed of the following measures:

- Be prepared

6. Understand your own ability, acquire the skills required for specific water activities and equip yourself with suitable protective gear;

7. Consult a doctor regarding your own fitness for engaging in water activities if you have a medical condition;

8. Avoid consuming alcohol;

9. Do not take illicit drugs; and

10. Be accompanied.

- Know the environment

11. Avoid water activities during adverse weather conditions, especially when a weather warning which affects water safety (including a typhoon, thunderstorm, rainstorm, strong monsoon or flooding warning) is issued by the Hong Kong Observatory;

12. Know the facilities, surroundings and risks involved;

13. Perform water activities in the presence of a lifeguard; and

14. Check relevant information at the website of the Hong Kong Observatory while planning water activities or hiking that will pass by a river or stream.

- Take care of companions

15. Supervise children and accompany elderly persons.

For access to the report and more information, please visit www.change4health.gov.hk/en/injury_prevention/safety_info/materials/index.html.