

Stay safe around rivers

As ministers ease restrictions on movement caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the public is being warned to keep safe around rivers and canals.

The Environment Agency, which manages many locks, weirs and bridges along the River Thames through Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey and south-west London, wants people to remember the hazards under the water.

[Guidance online at GOV.UK](#) – search staying safe around water – shows the message is clear: vigilance can save lives, and water-related accidents can be avoided by knowing how to stay safe.

Top tips for river safety:

1. Don't jump or dive in as the depth may vary and there can be unseen hazards.
2. Don't go in near weirs, locks, pipes and sluices. These and some other water features are often linked with strong currents.
3. Inland waters can be very cold, no matter how warm the weather. Those going into cold water can get cramp and experience breathing difficulties very quickly.
4. Keep a look out for boat traffic. Boaters, especially on larger vessels, can find it very hard to spot swimmers.

Parents and guardians can help keep children in their care safe by:

- teaching them to swim
- warning them not to go into water alone, or unsupervised
- ensuring they know where the children are and what they are doing
- supervising them closely when near any open water

Drowning can occur very quickly, even in shallow water, and the key to keeping safe is to take all necessary precautions to avoid getting into difficulty in the first place.

Experience shows it is often young people who get into trouble whilst swimming in open water, which contains hazards, particularly in and around locks, weirs and bridges. Unexpectedly cold waters or strong currents can also catch bathers off-guard.

Youngsters are often seen jumping off the many bridges along the Thames. While this may seem like great fun, there are hidden dangers in the water that can cause tragic consequences.

Russell Robson, River Thames operations manager for the Environment Agency, said:

Summer is always a busy time on our rivers, especially if the weather is good.

The River Thames is a focal point for leisure time, but I'd prefer people didn't swim in any river, unless part of an organised event.

One of the main risks is cold-water shock, causing you to breathe in water, weakening your muscles, and cause immediate heart problems. Unseen currents and reeds beneath the surface could pull you under.

I'd urge parents and guardians to supervise younger children closely in and around water. Teenagers and young adults should be warned of the dangers and to remember some basic safety points when out having fun.

Read and act upon our water safety advice on GOV.UK – search stay safe around water.

Anyone out in any kind of boat should wear a life jacket.