



# ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY UK **NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT UK 2022**

**226**  
water-related  
accidental  
fatalities in UK  
waterways

\* 'Accidental fatalities' refers to accidental causes and natural water related causes

Water Safety All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Report authored by the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK)  
Supported by The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF)


---

**How to read the numbers quoted in this report:**

Where a number of cases are reported, this is indicated by the abbreviation n=referring to the number of fatalities. Where the number is reported over another number, this illustrates the number of cases referenced, followed by the total number of cases reported.

**EXAMPLE:**

In 2022, 38% (n=226/597) of all water-related fatalities were recorded as accidental fatalities.

 out of 597 total cases, 226 were reported as accidental fatalities.

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy	7
Foreword	7
<b>2. Key Findings : Accidental Fatalities 2022</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Recommendations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. Water-related Fatalities in the UK</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. 2022 UK Accidental Fatalities</b>	<b>14</b>
Accidental Fatalities by UK Nation	16
Where and When do Accidental Fatalities Take Place?	19
Accidental Fatalities by Time of Year	23
Accidental Fatalities by Days of the Week	25
Accidental Fatalities and Activity Participation	27
Accidental Fatalities by Sex and Age	29
Contributory Factors: Alcohol and/or Drugs	35
Contributory Factors: The Risk of Cold-Water Shock	37
<b>6. Accidental Fatalities in Children: A Longer Term Analysis</b>	<b>38</b>



This report was sponsored by The Wetsuit Factory (TWF)

01

—

Introduction



## In 2014 the World Health Organisation (WHO) through the launch of their ‘Global Report on Drowning: Preventing a Leading Killer’ describes drowning as a highly preventable public health challenge.

Worldwide drowning has been described as being at epidemic levels and whilst each country and region faces challenges on various scales, in the UK we evaluate worrying trends and are not immune from the devastating impact of drowning. Indicated by child drowning increasing in 2022 vs. the 5-year average; it is currently one of the leading causes of child trauma-related deaths in the UK<sup>i</sup>.

Since the WHO Report, organisations and Governments worldwide have accelerated enhanced drowning prevention measures and in 2021 the United Nations (UN) adopted an historic resolution on global drowning prevention. The resolution, as an example and amongst other things, encouraged all member states to consider taking the following actions:

- a) **Appoint a national focal point for drowning prevention;**
- b) **Develop a national drowning prevention plan;**
- c) **Promote drowning prevention public awareness and behaviour-change campaigns;**
- d) **Consider the introduction of water safety, swimming and first aid lessons as part of school curricula, consistent with the member state’s governance framework for education.**

In addition, the resolution proclaimed 25 July as World Drowning Prevention Day.

This report is designed to aid the understanding of the challenges facing the UK and how this insight can be used to project improvements to tackle these challenges and reduce accidental drowning.

The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF), flanked by the emergence of Water Safety Wales (WSW) and Water Safety Scotland (WSS) are a collective of public sector organisations, government bodies, private sector organisations and charities, hosted by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), who have generated drowning prevention strategies for their national circumstances. They have the single aim to reduce drowning.

This report presents the current picture of UK drowning as analysed from 2022, and also identifies trends in relation to data over a five year period. Progress is being made across the UK and there a number of positive case studies included, but this report calls for enhanced Government involvement and helps to identify where collectively, in line with the encouragement from the UN, progress could be made to deliver the current targets set by the NWSF, WSW and WSS.

i. National Child Mortality Database (2021) [www.ncmd.info/publications/2nd-annual-report/](http://www.ncmd.info/publications/2nd-annual-report/)







---

# The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy

The National Water Safety Forum, hosted by ROSPA, created the first published UK Drowning Prevention Strategy covering the period 2016 - 2026. Organisations across the UK regularly align to contribute to achieving the strategy's lifesaving aim.

## PURPOSE

Prevent accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by working in partnership to ensure consistent guidance for the safe enjoyment and management of activities in, on and around water.

## AIM

Reduce accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 50% by 2026 and reduce risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities.

---

## Foreword

### Giles Watling

Chair of the All-Parliamentary Party Group (APPG) for Water Safety

"In my years as a yachtsman, keen swimmer and volunteering with the RNLI, I have come to learn the dangers that water can pose. To this end, suitable education on the threats, and how to mitigate the risks, is vital.

"I am grateful as the Chair of the All-Parliamentary Party Group (APPG) for Water Safety to have been able to work with the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) and find out more about the work that they are doing in this area to address this. During Drowning Prevention Week this June, the findings of this report by RLSS UK into what is currently being done – and what remains to be done – to save lives and prevent deaths by drowning, is welcome reading.

"We need to be clear: in the UK, there is clear intent to be on and enjoy the water. 226 people accidentally drowned in 2022, and only through better education about how to stay safe will we bring the number of fatalities down. Everyone should be able to enjoy the water whilst remaining informed on how to avoid tragic incidents, and I am pleased to see that RLSS UK is working to achieve just that."



# 02



## Key Findings: Accidental Fatalities 2022

226

water-related accidental fatalities in the UK, in line with pre-Covid levels.

151

accidental fatalities occurred in England – the highest of all the UK nations.

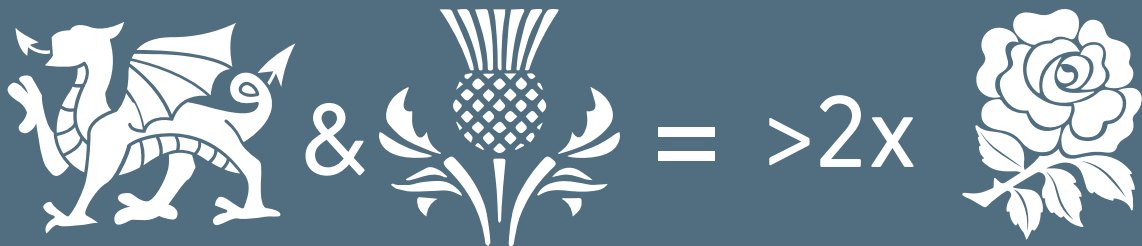
35

accidental child fatalities were reported – the equivalent of a classroom of children.

There was a **46% increase** in the number of accidental fatalities amongst children, compared to the 5-year average.



When taking into account population size per nation, **SCOTLAND AND WALES** had the highest accidental fatality rates, more than double that of England.



60%

of accidental fatalities occurred inland, reflecting patterns seen in previous years.

83%

of accidental fatalities were male, reflecting long-term trends.

26%

of accidental fatalities were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.



The average age of an accidental fatality inland was 35 years, compared to 51 years at the coast.

In summer 2022, there were

40%

more accidental fatalities inland than on the coast.

There was evidence of increased accidental fatalities during periods of extreme or prolonged hot weather:

19

people lost their lives across four consecutive days in July as UK temperatures reached record highs.



Fifth hottest

August on record coincided with an increase in the proportion of August fatalities (compared to 5-year average).

03

—

Recommendations



In relation to the directions set by the UN, WHO and the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy, this report sets out a number of key recommendations.

#### Recommendations for the UK, and devolved Governments:

- In response to the UN Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention, appoint a focal point for water safety and drowning prevention within Government.
- The Cabinet Office to facilitate a cross-departmental roundtable meeting to discuss the prevalence and current and future risk of drowning in the UK. Including the consideration of engaging with the National Water Safety Forum and partners to better understand the scale, scope, risks, and potential opportunities.
- As part of the levelling up agenda, serious investment is required to address the inequalities in certain communities accessing obligatory swimming and water safety provision (England), through a reform programme that:
  - o Investigates innovative solutions to better deliver school swimming
  - o Mandates every child to have a class-based water safety lesson at each key stage
  - o Urgently invests in initiatives to address the increase in child drowning fatalities
- Give consideration to allocating funding to help support the work of NWSF and its members to undertake key projects to improve research, data and intelligence collation and systems.
- In response to the UN Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention, promote established water safety and drowning campaigns, including World Drowning Prevention Day.

#### Tactical recommendations for Local Authorities and Local Water Safety Forums:

- A locally managed, risk-based analysis of potential hazardous inland water spots with the serious consideration of creating more supervised inland bathing sites open during the summer peak.
- Coastal rescue and lifeguard services should be invested in and preserved to maintain the number of lifesaving events.
- Strategies should be enhanced to ensure an adequate number of lifeguards are deployed at both inland (including public and private pools) and coastal locations.
- Urgent investment in initiatives to address the increase in child drowning fatalities.
- Water safety education to be targeted at those most at risk relevant to the water, especially around inland locations.
- Water safety messaging targeted at inland locations needs to start pre-June in preparation for an early summer peak.
- Water safety messaging targeted at coastal locations needs to focus on a July and August peak.
- Prepare public messages to ensure suitable proactive actions when there are extreme weather events.
- Messaging needs to carefully consider those around water, who are not actively planning to take part in water-based activities.
- Continue to target messaging related to alcohol-impacted drowning to sustain the reduced number of fatalities.

04

—

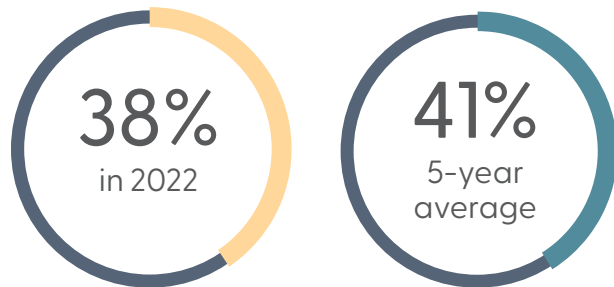
# Water-related Fatalities in the UK

There were 3,052 water-related fatalities in UK waterways between 2018 and 2022. On average, around 2 in 5 of these n=1,243/3,052 were recorded as 'accidental fatalities' (due to accidental or natural water related causes).

In 2022, 38% (n=226/597) of all water-related fatalities were recorded as accidental fatalities. There are also 155 cases where the cause is still unrecorded/unknown and, as such, the total number of reported accidental fatalities may increase further as additional information becomes available.

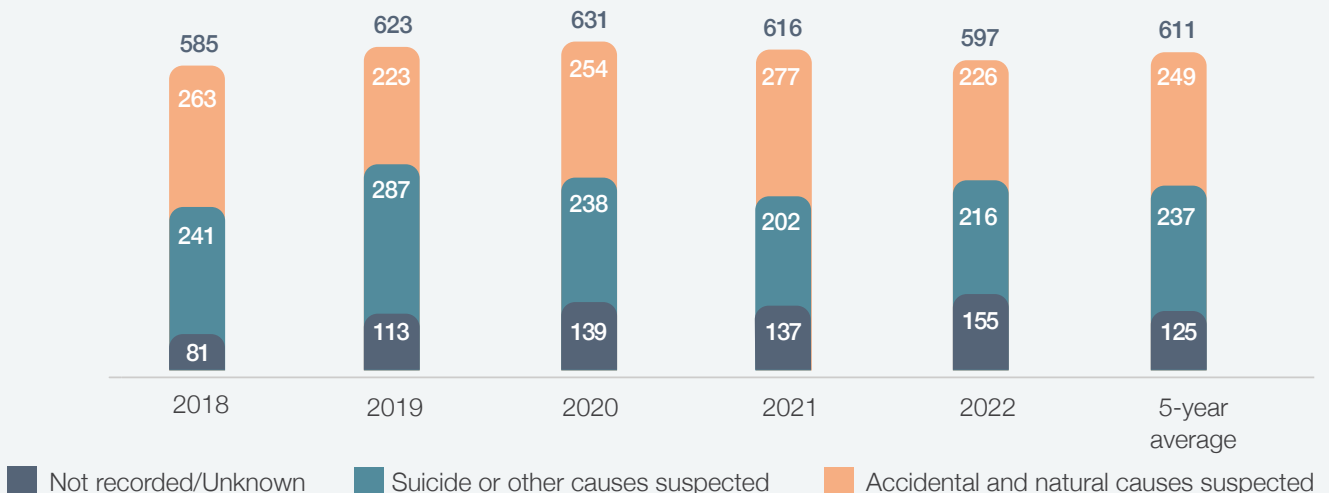
The remainder of this report focuses on accidental fatalities, and includes all reported cases, correct as of May 2023. Where the report compares 2022 statistics to the 5-year average, this covers the period from 2018 to 2022 inclusive.

2022 Accidental Fatalities as a Proportion of all Water Fatalities



Base: All UK water-related fatalities 2022 (597), 2018-2022 (3,052)

FIG. 1: Number of UK water-related fatalities by suspected cause, by year



05

—

2022 UK Accidental Fatalities

In 2022, there were 226 water-related accidental fatalities in UK waterways. This number falls 23 below the 5-year average (n=249) and saw the number of recorded accidental drowning fatalities return to levels seen pre-Covid, in 2019 (n=223).

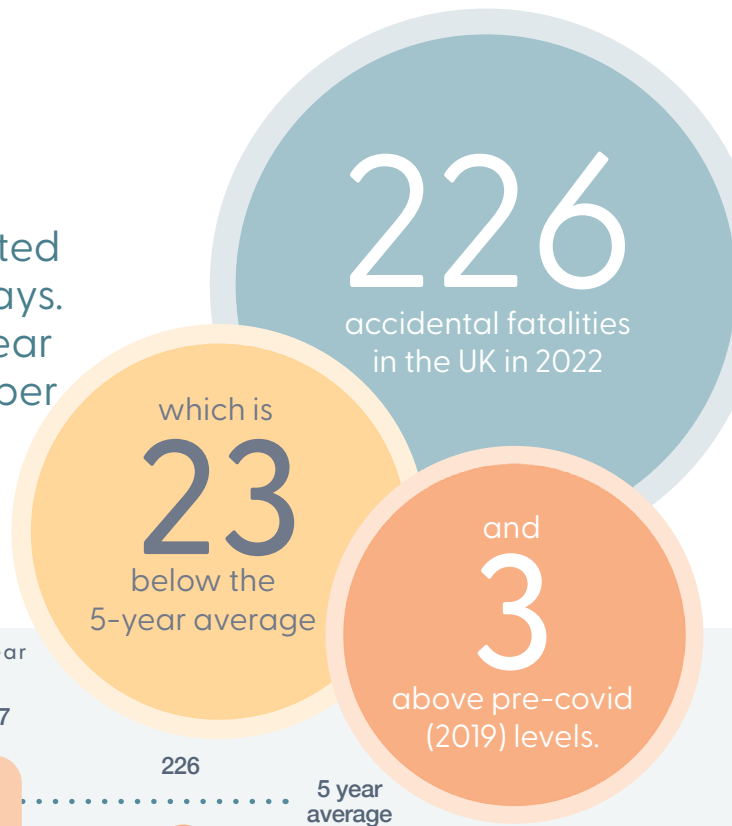
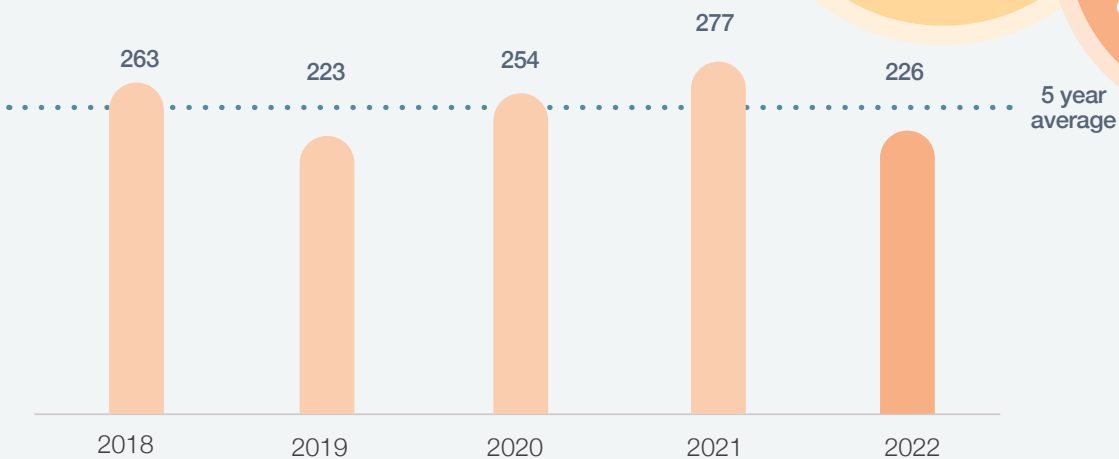


FIG. 2: Number of accidental UK water-related fatalities by year



The accidental fatality rate in 2022 was 3.37 accidental fatalities per 1,000,000 people. This falls behind the 5-year average of 3.71.

Table 1: UK accidental fatality rates 2022 compared to the 5-year average

	Estimated population	2022		5-YEAR AVERAGE	
		Number of fatalities	Overall risk per 1,000,000 of population	Number of fatalities	Overall risk per 1,000,000 of population
UK	67,026,000	226	3.37	249	3.71

2022 and 5-year accidental fatality rates calculated based on latest population data, mid-2021 (ONS) Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

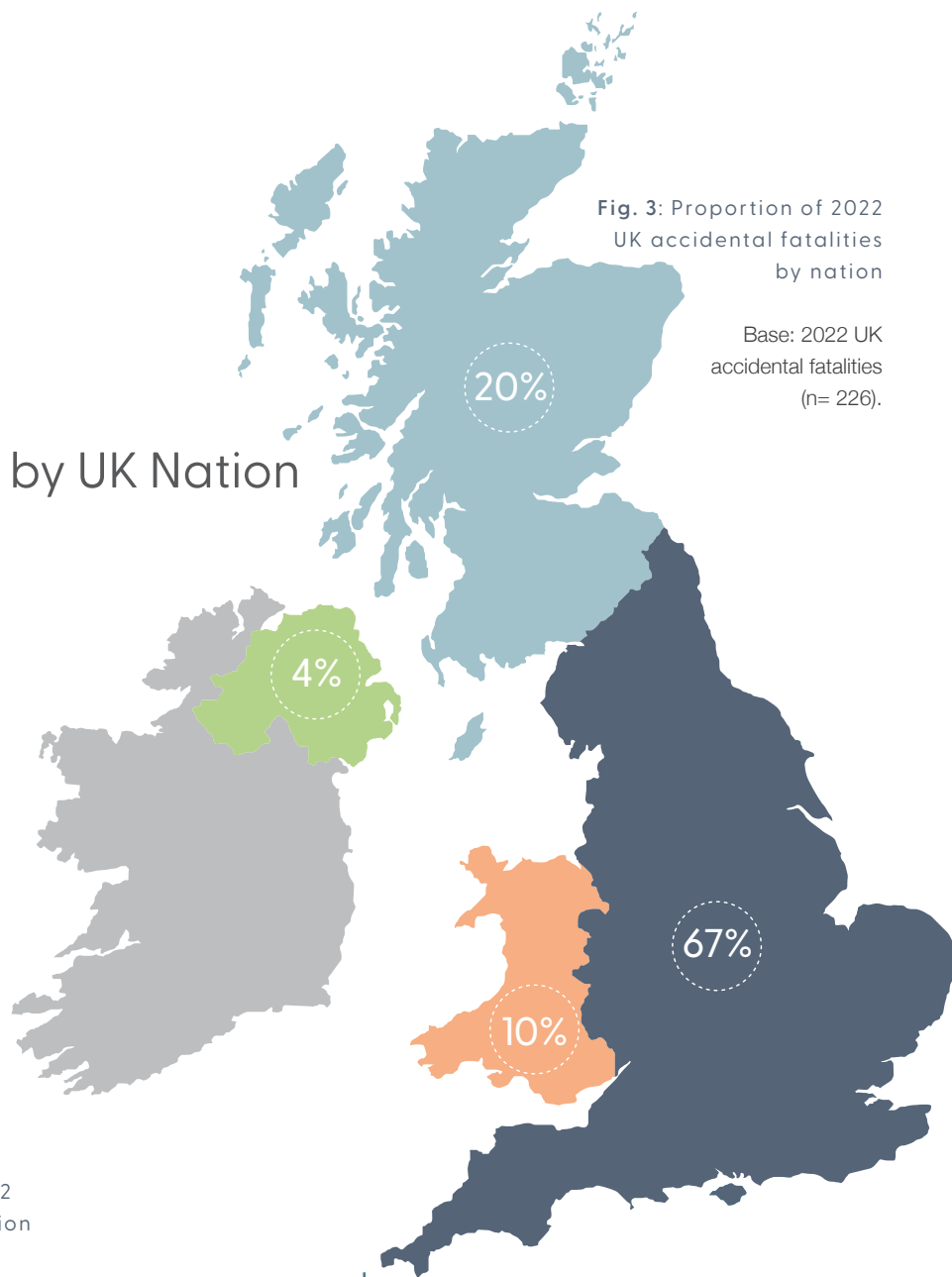
**Fig. 3: Proportion of 2022 UK accidental fatalities by nation**

Base: 2022 UK accidental fatalities (n= 226).

## Accidental Fatalities by UK Nation

In 2022, 226 accidental fatalities occurred throughout the UK. England accounted for the highest number, amounting to two-thirds of the overall UK total (67%, n=151). When accounting for differences in population, the English accidental fatality rate was the lowest of all UK nations, at 2.67 per 1,000,000 people.

Scotland showed the highest accidental fatality rate of 8.21 per 1,000,000, followed by Wales at 7.09 per 1,000,000. These findings fall in line with the 5-year averages by nation and highlight the importance of the work being undertaken by organisations in both Scotland and Wales to tackle a relatively high number of accidental fatalities.



**Table 2: UK accidental fatality rates 2022 compared to the 5-year average by nation**

	Estimated population	2022		5-YEAR AVERAGE	
		Number of fatalities	Overall risk per 1,000,000 of population	Number of fatalities	Overall risk per 1,000,000 of population
UK	67,026,000	226	3.37	249	3.71
ENGLAND	56,536,000	151	2.67	170	3.01
SCOTLAND	5,480,000	45	8.21	45	8.21
WALES	3,105,000	22	7.09	23	7.41
NORTHERN IRELAND	1,905,000	8	4.20	10	5.25

2022 and 5-year accidental fatality rates calculated based on latest population data, mid-2021 (ONS) [Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/population-demography/population/population-estimates-for-the-uk)





## Water Safety Scotland

Water Safety Scotland is a partnership of member organisations whose main goal is to reduce accidental drowning in Scotland by 50% by 2026. It's work addresses the aims set out in Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy (2018-2026) and the Water Safety Action Plan released by the Minister for Community Safety in March 2022.

Each year Water Safety Scotland releases an in-depth data trend report for organisations across Scotland.

Achievements in 2022:

- The creation and release of water safety education materials for use in Scottish schools and embedded in the curriculum for pupils aged three-18 years
- Development of the Partner Approach to Water Safety (PAWS) groups in Scotland's 32 local authorities, meaning that water risks and mitigations can be examined at a local level by those with the most knowledge
- A successful water safety open day in support of World Drowning Prevention Day (25 July) at the Helix in Falkirk
- The creation of a full Communication Toolkit for members to use which includes: preventative messaging and incident/post incident protocols
- Creation of the Drowning and Incident Review (DIR) which is a process that aims to gather data and understand the contributory factors of a water-related incident to help gain a better understanding of how to prevent similar incidents from occurring in future.





## Water Safety Wales

Water Safety Wales is committed to reducing drowning deaths and keeping our communities safe around water.

The Welsh Drowning Prevention Strategy launched in 2020 has seven key aims:

- Improve water incident data and intelligence in Wales
- Promote and develop learning to swim and water safety education
- Promote and support the development of water safety plans
- Promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure consistent messages reach the right people at the right time
- Promote the safe participation in water activities across Wales
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide
- Work with families affected by water-related incidents

Each year Water Safety Wales releases an in-depth data trend report for organisations across Wales.



## Water Safety Northern Ireland

Work is underway to establish a national water safety forum in Northern Ireland.



TREND REPORTS  
BROKEN DOWN  
BY UK NATION

## Where and When do Accidental Fatalities Take Place?

### Inland vs. coastal accidental fatalities in 2022

In 2022, a higher number of UK accidental fatalities occurred in 'inland' open water (60%, n=130/216) compared to 'coastal' sites (40%, n=86/216).

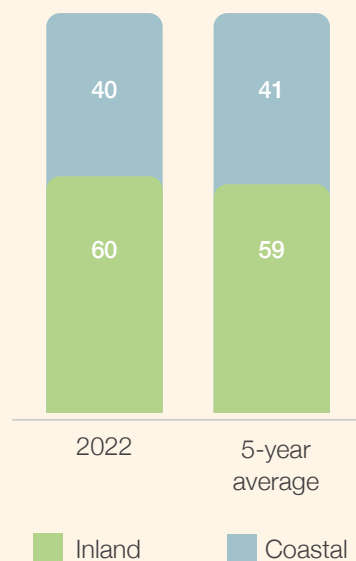
'Inland' refers to the following locations: canal/aqueduct, dry ground, drain/well, lake/loch/lough, marsh, pond, quarry, reservoir, river, stream/ditch/burn. 'Coastal' includes at sea, harbour/dock, coast/shore/beach. Locations excluded from this analysis are bath, pool (swimming) and water container.

This finding is consistent with the 5-year average, where a higher proportion of accidental fatalities have been reported 'inland' (59%) compared to 'coastal' sites (41%).

### 2022 Accidental fatalities in other locations:

In addition, there were 10 accidental fatalities that took place in other locations. Of these, the majority were in a bath/jacuzzi/hot tub (n=7/10).

FIG. 4: % UK accidental fatalities by location



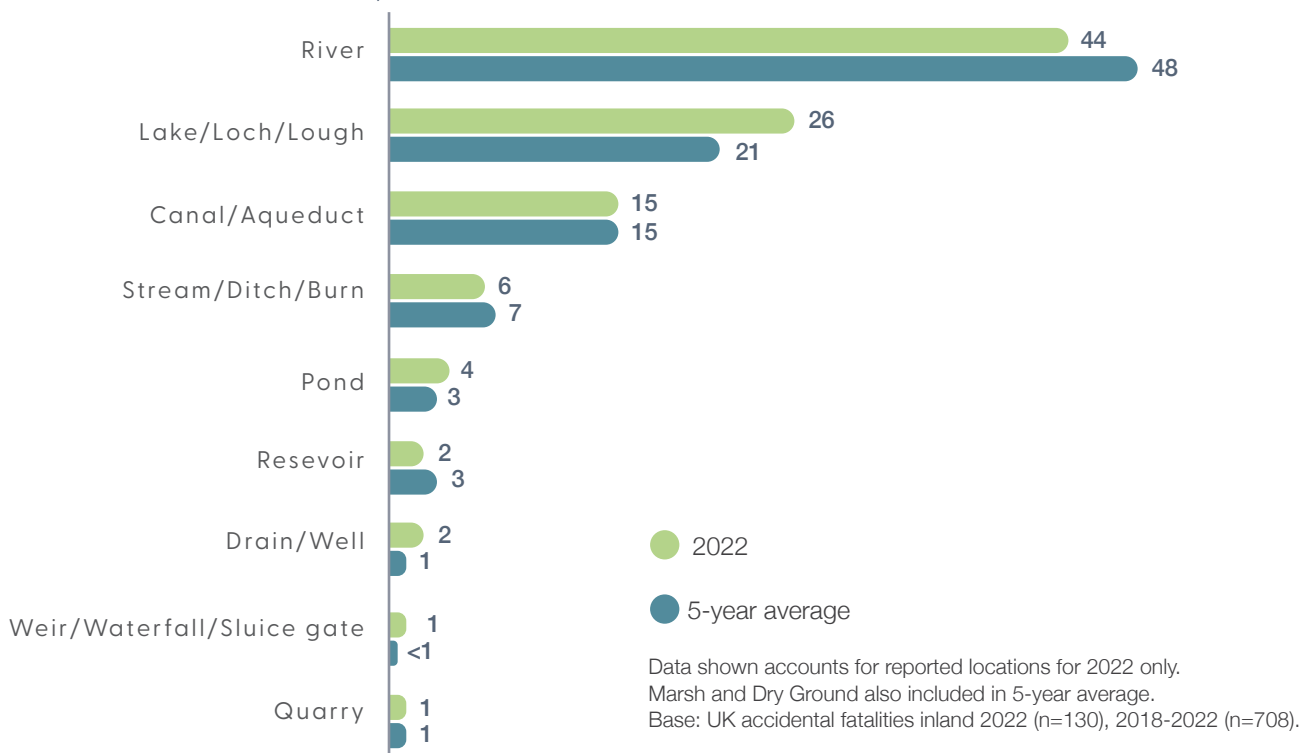
Base: UK Accidental Fatalities Inland and in Coastal Locations 2022 (n= 216), 2018-2022 (n=1,191).

## Accidental Fatalities Inland

In 2022, rivers continued to be the most frequently reported location for inland accidental fatalities, accounting for 2 in 5 (44%, n=57/130) of the total. Most people who lost their life in rivers fell or were swept into the water unexpectedly (58% n=33/57). Lake/loch/loughs accounted for 1 in 4 inland accidental fatalities (26%, n=34/130), with canals/aqueducts accounting for around 1 in 6 (15%, n=19/130).

In total 85% of inland accidental fatalities occurred in rivers, lakes, and canals (n=110/130), which reflects the 5-year average. This data emphasises the importance of specifically targeting water safety interventions, such as community led risk assessments at these types of location as priority, as well as focusing on getting the right education to those communities closest to these types of water body.

FIG. 5: % UK accidental fatalities by inland location



### Inland

Inland water surrounds most UK communities and is predominantly freely accessible, yet the number of supervised inland sites is not currently comparable to UK coastal locations. Therefore those accessing the water inland do not benefit from professional and immediate supervision.

There are various activities and effective measures in existence to prevent drownings in inland waters. Managing Safety at Inland Water Sites, prepared by ROSPA in partnership with The Royal Life Saving Society UK provides guidance to those in control of inland water sites where visitors have access to the water.





## Aqua Parks and Safe Open Water Sites

The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) facilitates the UK's first accreditation scheme for UK aqua parks, created by The Aqua Park Association UK and Ireland. The scheme introduces a recognised and consistent safety standard, making accredited aqua parks some of the safest in the world.

RLSS UK is the appointed auditor for the Aqua Parks Association UK and Ireland, inspecting parks that have signed up for the scheme against the standards set. In 2022, RLSS UK accredited 34 UK and Irish aqua parks, a 20% increase on 2021. An estimated 1.4million aqua park visitors benefitted from enhanced water safety as a result of an increase in safe and accessible inland Aqua Park sites.

In addition, there are various sites around the UK and Ireland which have measures in place to help keep open water swimmers safe.

There has been an increase in lifeguarded open water sites to ensure that swimmers can enjoy swimming in open water safely as well as plenty of safety advice from organisations such as RLSS UK.

## Lifesaving Equipment

Various organisations work with local authorities, land owners and local water safety groups to ensure they have appropriate water safety provisions in place to keep members of the public and visitors safe.

RLSS UK has assembled a team of consultants to work closely with local authorities, owners and operators of swimming pools and water sites, as well as event organisers, to offer support in all aspects of safety in and around water.

Fire and Rescue services also work closely with councils to ensure the installation of water safety equipment at key sites around the country.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) and Newcastle City Council announced the installation of 14 new throw-bag boards on the Quayside, replacing life rings along the River Tyne that had been damaged or stolen. Not long after the installation, the equipment was needed to perform a rescue when a woman entered the water.

Northumbria Police were able to use the newly installed throw-bags to ensure the woman's safety in the water. Firefighters from the local fire station then used their fire boat to bring the woman to safety.



## Accidental Fatalities in Coastal Locations

Of n=86 accidental fatalities that occurred in coastal locations in 2022, 68 (79%) were at the coast/shore/beach, in line with the 5-year average.

13% of 2022 accidental fatalities on the coast were reported in a harbour/dock/marina/port (n=11/86), with a further 8% at sea (n=7/86). The proportion of fatalities recorded at each coastal location again reflect the 5-year average for accidental fatalities reported in coastal locations.

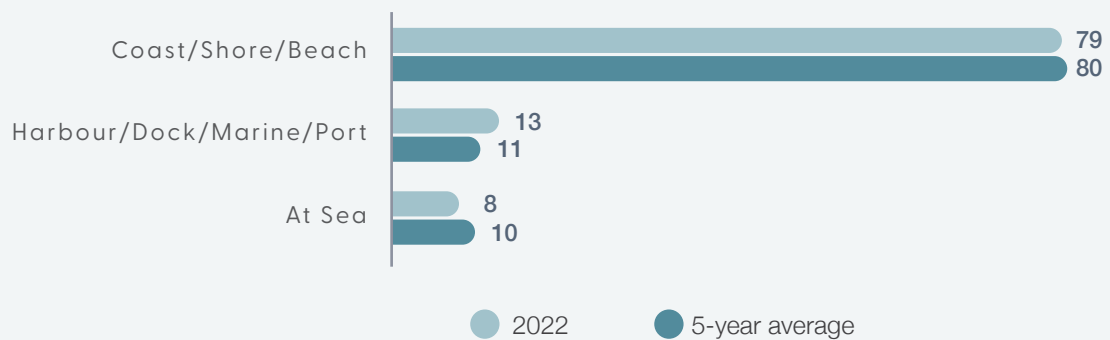
A significant number of people visit the UK's coast, shore and beaches every year. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) reported that over 25m people visited UK beaches in 2022<sup>1</sup>. Organisations such as His Majesty's Coastguard (HM Coastguard) and The RNLI play a critical role in providing lifeguarding and rescue services to minimise the loss of life from accidental fatalities.

HM Coastguard coordinates all maritime search and rescue in the UK, covering 11,000 miles of coastline as well as some inland sites. In 2022, HM Coastguard logged 36,505 incidents, the majority of which occurred at the coast.

1,632 RNLI Lifeguards provided 206,304 supervised beach patrol hours on UK beaches, initiating 4,067,392 preventative actions (such as advice, guidance, or direction) to mitigate risk. They aided 23,204 people and conducted 6,784 assists/rescues<sup>1</sup>.

These preventative measures are sure to play a critical role in minimising the lives lost to accidental fatalities in coastal locations.

FIG. 6: % UK accidental fatalities by coastal location



Base: UK coastal accidental fatalities 2022 (n=86), 2018-2022 (n=483).

<sup>1</sup> RNLI Lifeguard Report (2022)



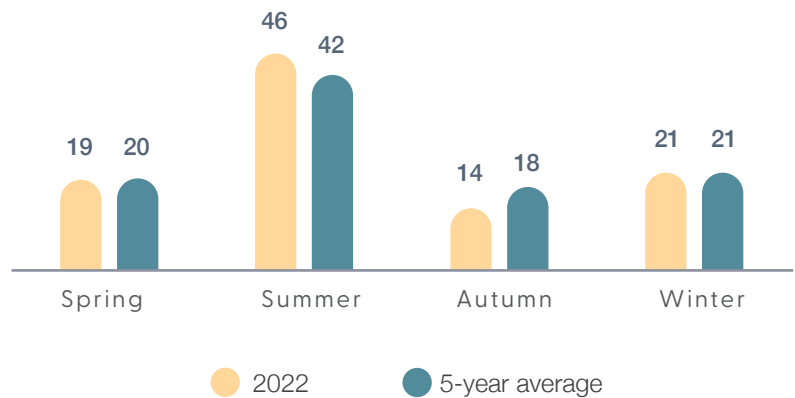
## Accidental Fatalities by Time of Year

In 2022, water-related accidental fatalities occurred throughout the seasons.

There was an uplift in the proportion of summer accidental fatalities at 46% (n=105/226) compared to the 5-year average of 42% (520/1,243).

Around 1 in 5 incidents occurred in spring (19% n=43/226) and a similar proportion in winter (21% n=47/226), with a lower proportion reported during the autumn (14% n=31/226), reflecting a dip in the proportion of accidental fatalities vs. 5-year average.

FIG. 7: % UK accidental fatalities by season

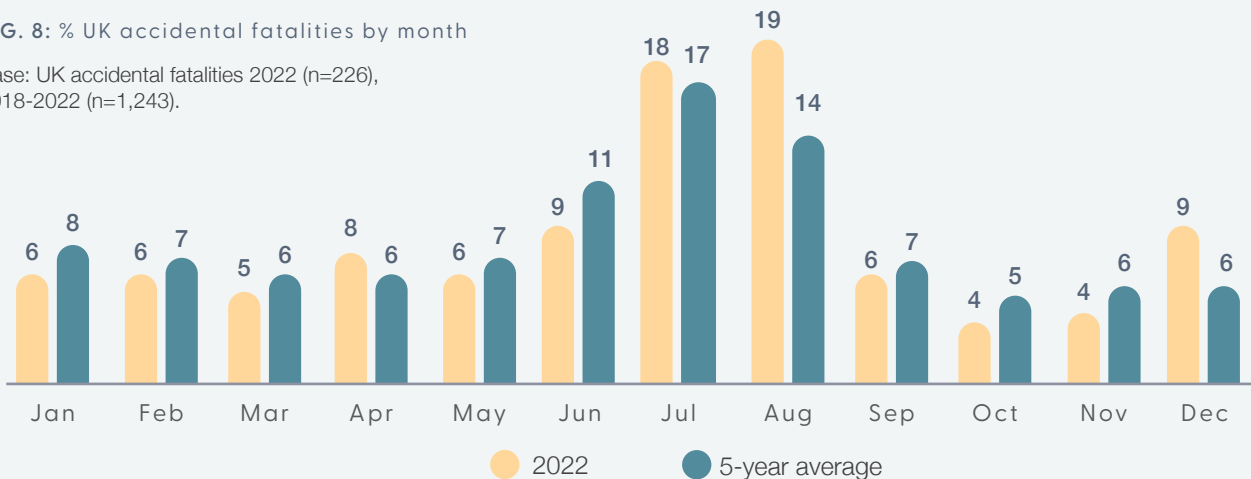


Base: UK accidental fatalities 2022 (n=226), 2018-2022 (n=1,243).

By month, August 2022 reported a higher proportion of accidental fatalities (n=44/226, 19%), ahead of the 5-year average of 14% (n=173/1243). In line with the spike in accidental fatalities seen in August 2022, the UK also reported the 5th hottest August on record.<sup>2</sup>

FIG. 8: % UK accidental fatalities by month

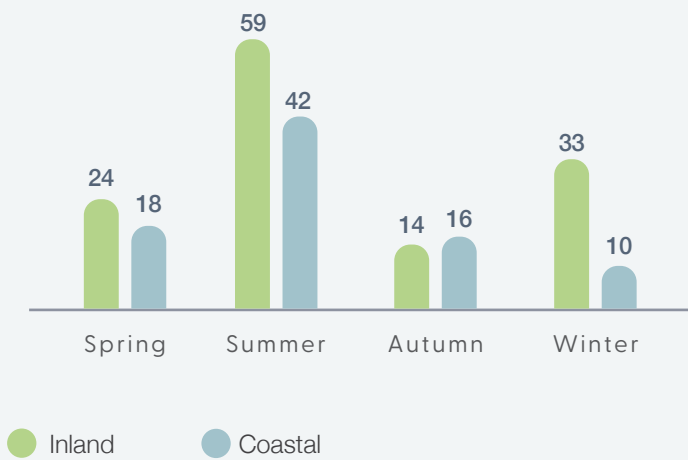
Base: UK accidental fatalities 2022 (n=226), 2018-2022 (n=1,243).



<sup>2</sup> Met Office [www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/joint-hottest-summer-on-record-for-england](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/joint-hottest-summer-on-record-for-england)

Months are grouped as follows: **Spring:** March, April, May. **Summer:** June, July, August. **Autumn:** September, October, November. **Winter:** December, January, February.

**FIG. 9:** Number of 2022 UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities by season



Base: 2022 UK inland (n=130) and coastal (n=86) accidental fatalities.

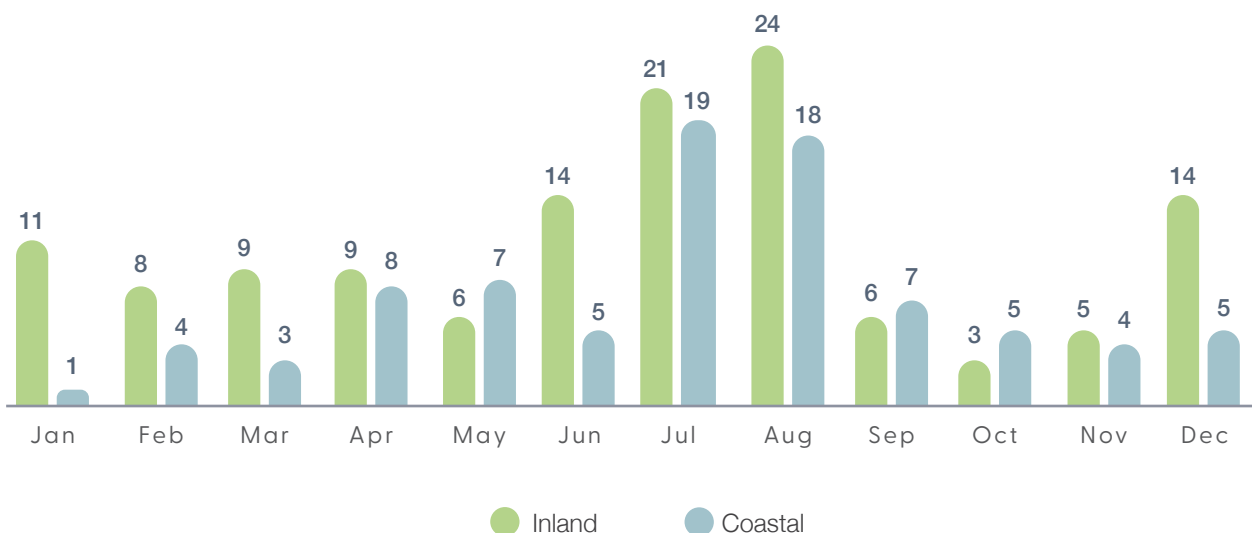
In the summer of 2022, accidental fatalities were 40% higher inland (n=59) than in coastal locations (n=42).

Accidental fatalities in winter were three times higher at inland locations (n=33), compared to those on the coast (n=10).

Inland accidental fatalities started to increase earlier in the summer, with n=14 reported in June, compared to n=5 on the coast. Accidental fatalities at the coast peaked in July and August, in line with the typical UK holiday period.

By reviewing the occurrence of accidental fatalities by location throughout the year, we can see that there is clearly a need for year-round awareness of the risks of open water, with particular emphasis on raising awareness regarding inland risk in late spring and ahead of the winter months and heightened messaging on the coast mid-Summer, in July and August.

**FIG. 10:** Number of 2022 UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities by month



Base: 2022 UK inland (n= 130) and coastal (n=86) accidental fatalities.

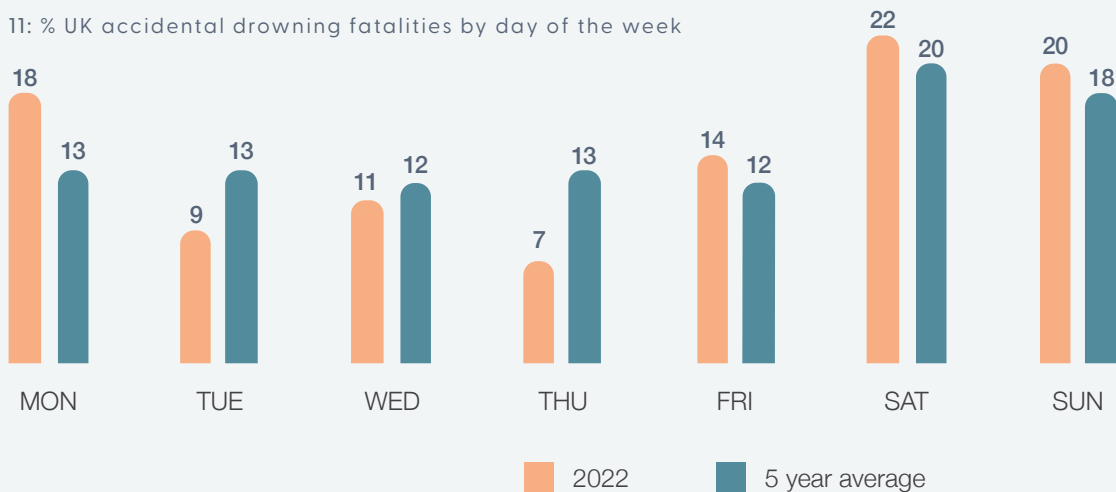
Months are grouped as follows: **Spring:** March, April, May. **Summer:** June, July, August. **Autumn:** September, October, November. **Winter:** December, January, February.

## Accidental Fatalities by Days of the Week

In 2022 we saw that 42% (n=94/226) of accidental fatalities occurred at the weekend, an uplift on the 5-year average of 38% (n=472/1243).

Fatalities continued to be reported throughout the week, with an increase in the proportion reported on a Monday during 2022, to 18%, compared to the 5-year average of 13%.

FIGURE 11: % UK accidental drowning fatalities by day of the week



Base: UK accidental fatalities 2022 (n= 226), 2018-2022 (n= 1,243).

This increase was underpinned by n=7 accidental fatalities occurring Monday 18 July 2022. This date is significant because the Met Office issued it's first ever Red warning for extreme heat. The daily temperature exceeded 38°C<sup>3</sup>.



Seven people  
lost their lives  
on Monday 18 July 2022  
when temperatures exceeded 38°C.

<sup>3</sup> [www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/red-extreme-heat-warning](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/red-extreme-heat-warning)

## IN FOCUS:

This brief but unprecedented extreme heatwave covered the period from 16 to 19 July 2022, as hot air moved north from the near continent. In total, 19 accidental fatalities were reported across these four days.

More research is needed to understand the potential link between air temperature increases and accidental fatalities. This is particularly important as research from the MET office suggests that periods of extreme and prolonged warm spells are likely to become more frequent in the UK. There's also a likelihood of more frequent rainfall, and coastal flooding as a result of wetter winters and rising sea-levels.

Probabilities suggest that by the 2070s, and compared to the climate in 1990<sup>4</sup>:

### Summer

- Summers will be between 1 and 6°C warmer
- Summers will be up to 60% drier, depending on the region
- The average hottest summer day will be between 4 and 7°C warmer
- The chance of exceeding 40°C will be similar to the chance of exceeding 32°C in 1990
- Intensity of rain will increase by up to 20%

### Winter

- Winters will be between 1 and 4.5°C warmer
- Winters will be up to 30% wetter

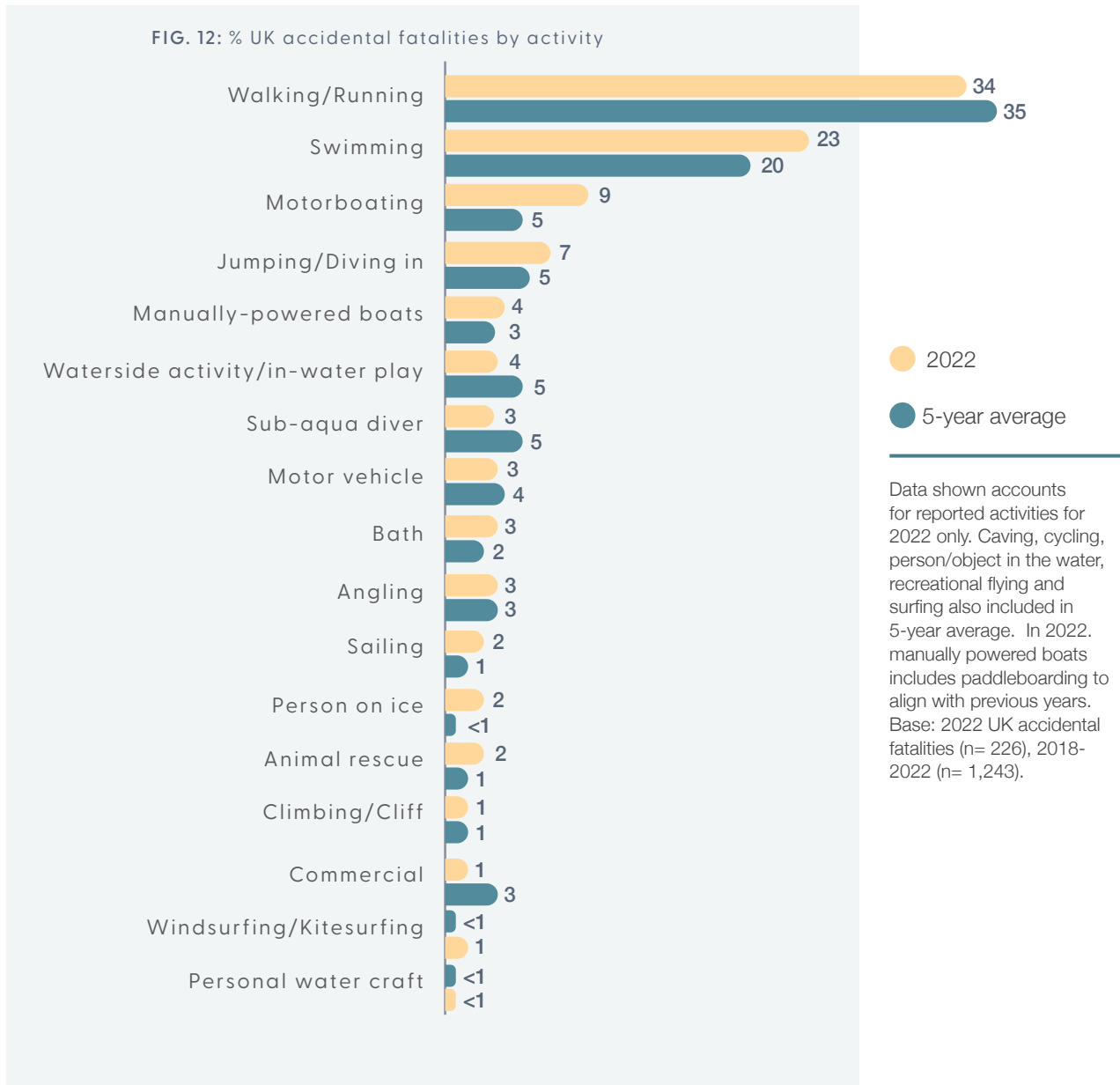
Whilst we seek to learn more about the relationship between extreme weather and accidental fatalities, organisations offering support and advice should look to drive awareness of the risks associated with being in, on and around water and reinforce safety guidance ahead of forecasts for extreme weather events.

<sup>4</sup> Climate change in the UK - Met Office [www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/climate-change-in-the-uk](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/climate-change-in-the-uk)

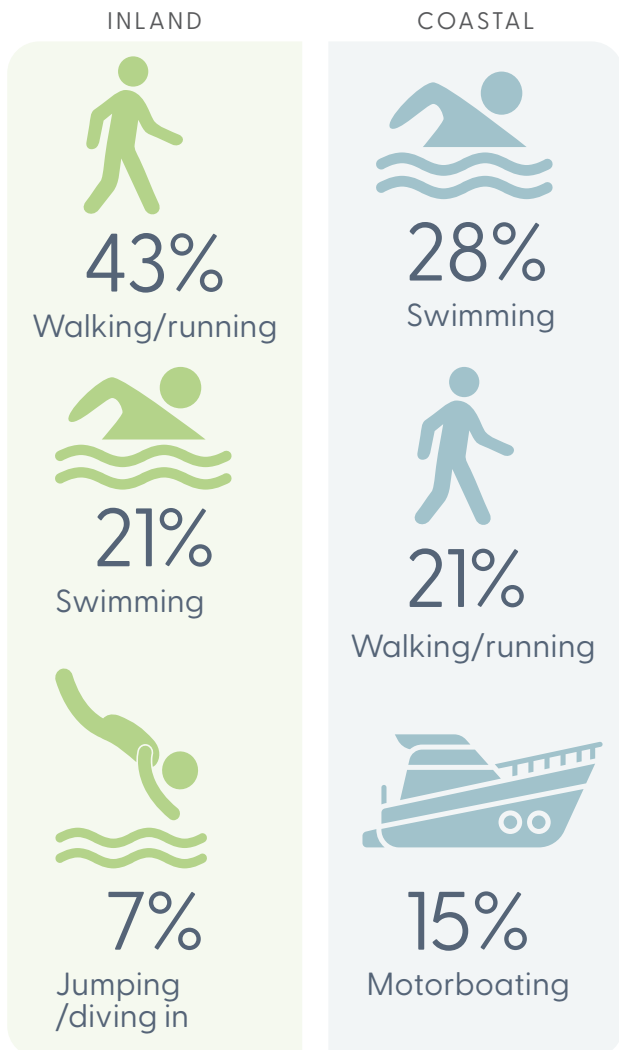
# Accidental Fatalities and Activity Participation

Accidental fatalities occurred whilst taking part in a wide range of activities during 2022. The overall proportion of incidents that were reported for each activity remained largely unchanged vs the 5-year-average, with walking/running accounting for a third of all accidental fatalities. (34% n=76/226). 23% of accidental fatalities in 2022 occurred whilst swimming (n=53), slightly ahead of the 5-year average of 20% (245/1,243).

There was an uplift in the proportion of incidents whilst motorboating in 2022 at 9% (n=21/226) compared to the 5-year average of 5% (n=62/1,243). The number of motorboating related incidents in 2022 was impacted by two multiple fatality events, in June and December, accounting for a total of n=6 accidental fatalities.



Most frequently reported activities at the time of accidental fatality



Base: 2022 UK accidental fatalities inland (n=130), coastal (n=86).

According to the Active Lives Survey (2021/22), 3.6m people took part in open water swimming in the last year, with 606,800 open water swimming in the last month, an increase of 48% on 2020/21.

The Water Sports Participation Survey (2021) reported 7.2m UK adults took part in paddle sport activities in 2021. However, less than 10% of these were regularly paddling (714,000)<sup>5</sup>, suggesting more often than not, those participating in activities on the water may lack the experience to know what to do in a challenging situation. Offering appropriate safety guidance and protocols to those looking to participate in outdoor water sports is therefore important to minimise the risks.

<sup>5</sup> [https://mymembership.britishmarine.co.uk/media/putms4uv/4eb\\_watersports\\_participation\\_survey\\_2021\\_-\\_for\\_publication.pdf](https://mymembership.britishmarine.co.uk/media/putms4uv/4eb_watersports_participation_survey_2021_-_for_publication.pdf)

In 2022, over 70% of inland accidental fatalities occurred whilst taking part in one of the most frequently reported activities – walking/running (43% n=56/130), swimming (21% n= 27/130) or jumping/diving in (7% n=9/130).

At the coast, the 3 most frequently reported activities account for 64% of coastal accidental fatalities (55/86) and include swimming (28% n=24/86), walking/running (21% n=18/86) and motorboating (15% n= 13/86).

These findings highlight the importance of delivering water safety messages not just for those intending to enter the water, but also those who may be taking part in other activities close to open water. The dangers of water for walkers and runners should be especially highlighted inland, as well as the risks with swimming in inland open water and entering water suddenly via a jump or dive.

On the coast, risks of being near water should be emphasised to all, as well as the additional risks associated with being in the water for those looking to swim in coastal waters. This includes the teaching of techniques such as floating in water safety programmes and in the school curriculum.

### British Canoeing

British Canoeing recently became the National Governing Body for Stand Up Paddle Boarding (SUP), sharing responsibility with Surfing England. This recognition requires British Canoeing to provide SUP with good governance and a responsibility to develop the sport in all its facets and forms.

British Canoeing generates clear safety information and messaging across all SUP stakeholders, from manufacturers, to retailers, to commercial and voluntary deliverers of SUP activity. British Canoeing works with a number of key organisations including Surfing England, RNLI, Water Skills Academy (WSA), British Stand Up Paddleboarding Association (BSUPA) and others to ensure that safety messages are consistent, clear and well promoted across the country.

British Canoeing has also put plans in place to work with stakeholders and partners that are involved in the delivery of commercial SUP operations to introduce a national kitemarking scheme. This provides local authorities and the general public with reassurance that those individuals and organisations that deliver SUP activity on a commercial basis are safe, appropriately qualified and have the processes in place to deliver safe, fun and purposeful SUP activity.



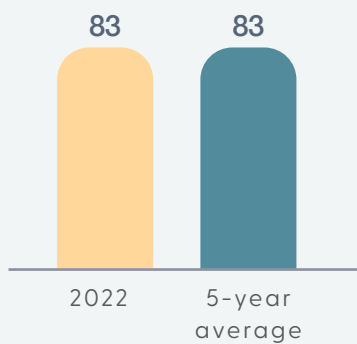


# Accidental Fatalities by Sex and Age

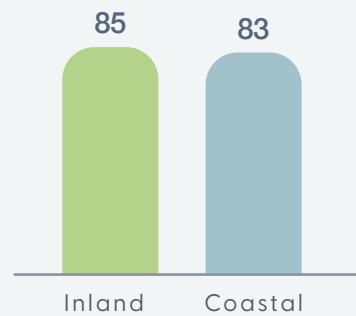
## Sex

83% of accidental fatalities in 2022 were male (n=187/226), which falls directly in line with the 5-year average (83%, n=1,028/1,243). The proportion of male fatalities was consistent for both inland and coastal locations, with males accounting for more than 4 in 5 of those that lost their lives in both types of location.

**FIG. 13:** % UK accidental fatalities where sex is recorded as male



**FIG. 14:** % UK accidental fatalities where sex is recorded as male



Base: UK accidental fatalities, 2022 (n=226), 2018-2022 (n=1,243), Inland 2022 (n= 130), Coastal 2022 (n= 86).

## Age

In 2022, accidental fatalities were evident across all age groups, with the average age (where known) being 39.8 years of age, below with the 5-year average of 43.7 years.

**Table 3:** Average age of UK accidental fatalities (where known)

2022	5-YEAR AVERAGE
39.8 years old	43.7 years old

2022 UK accidental fatalities where exact age is known 2022 (193), 2018-2022 (1,163).



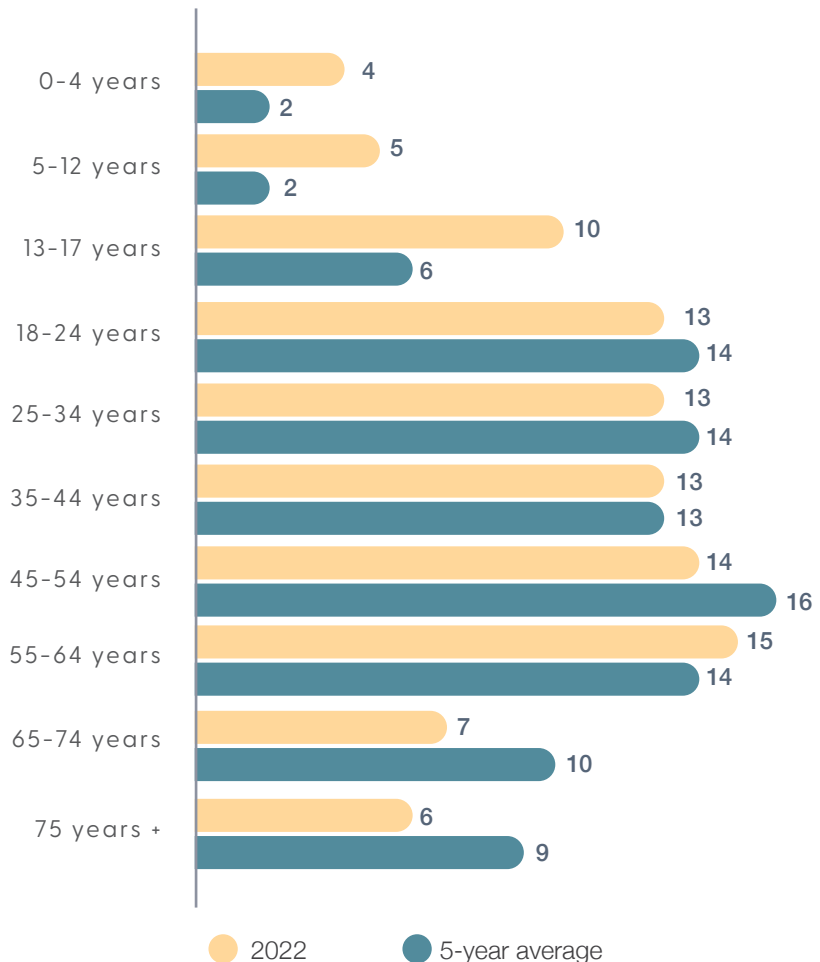
There was a **46% increase** in the number of accidental fatalities amongst children, compared to the 5-year average.



FIG. 15: % UK accidental fatalities by age (where known) compare the 5-year average

Whilst for adults, the proportion of fatalities that occurred in each age group remained largely unchanged, in 2022, there was an increase in the proportion of accidental fatalities reported amongst children in all age groups vs. the 5-year average.

In absolute numbers, this represents a 46% increase in accidental fatalities amongst children in 2022 (n=35) vs. the 5-year average (n=24).



Base: UK accidental fatalities, where age band is known 2022 (n= 193), 2018-2022 (n= 1,163).

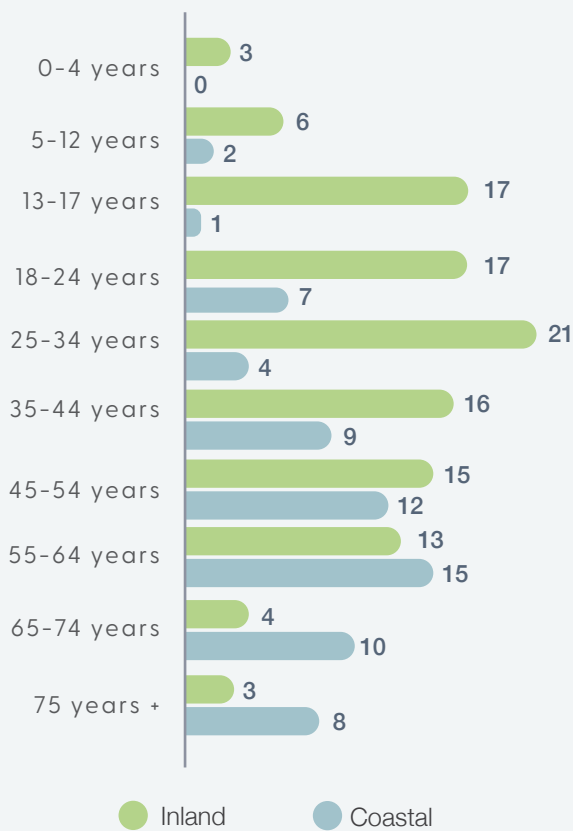
We saw a marked difference in the average age of accidental fatalities inland when compared to the coast in 2022. Inland, the average age of someone who drowned was, where known, 34.6 years old (n=115). This compares to 51.3 years for coastal locations (n=68).

**Table 4:** Average age of UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities (where known)

INLAND	COASTAL
34.6 years old	51.3 years old

2022 UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities where exact age is known Inland (n= 115), coastal (n= 68).

**FIG. 16:** Number of UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities by age (where known)



These figures are impacted by the high proportion of accidental fatalities reported amongst children inland compared to on the coast. Of the n=29 child fatalities in open water in 2022, 90% (n=26) were reported to have occurred inland.

Base: 2022 UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities where exact age is known Inland (n= 115), coastal (n= 68).

As the risk of accidental fatality clearly changes and differs across coastal and inland, it is fundamental for the UK's approach that interventions are targeted and are age appropriate.

The Education Working Group of the National Water Safety Forum, directed by RLSS UK, Swim England, and the RNLI has produced a core competency framework that aims to guide consistent messages for child-centred programmes, aligned to The Water Safety Code.

## ALWAYS FOLLOW THE WATER SAFETY CODE

Whenever you are around water:

**STOP AND THINK**



Take time to assess your surroundings. Look for the dangers and always research local signs and advice.

**STAY TOGETHER**

When around water always go with friends or family. Swim at a lifeguarded venue.



In an emergency:

**Call 999**



Ask for the Fire and Rescue Service when inland and the Coastguard if at the coast. Don't enter the water to rescue.

**FLOAT**



Fall in or become tired - stay calm, float on your back and call for help. Throw something that floats to somebody that has fallen in.

The water safety industry across the UK has a number of bespoke initiatives. The following case studies represent some innovative working examples.



### Canal and River Trust – Water Safety for Little Explorers (18 months – five years)



Canal and River Trust, the charity which cares for 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales, in 2022 planned a new water safety campaign for children and their parents and carers.

The trust recognised there was a gap in their education offering for ages 18 months - five-year-olds, but more specifically for the parents and carers of these children. After conducting a survey to parents/carers of children under five, the trust saw that 63% of people avoid visiting the water due to anxiety about their child falling in.

With hundreds of thousands of visits by parents with young children to the canals each week, the campaign aimed to help people feel more confident about the time they enjoy along the waterways, with advice about talking to young children about being safe by the water.

A new 90-second film, with a voice over by children's presenter Maddie Moate, shows toddlers how to Stay Away From the Edge (stay SAFE) by taking two steps back. Two animated squirrels join in on the fun and viewers can see footage of other toddlers learning to take two steps back from the water.

Feedback from a parent: "We visited our local canal this weekend and stopped to look for boats and our toddler said 'we need to take two steps back so it definitely works! He also made me play the video three times and was smiling throughout so I think he approves!"



## Drowning Prevention Week (5-15 year olds)

In June each year the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) runs one of the largest summer water safety campaigns across the UK and Ireland. The campaign proactively raises awareness of water safety with school aged children and their families ahead of a summer outdoors. With the risk to the public through accidental drowning increasing significantly through the summer, Drowning Prevention Week is critical in raising awareness and encouraging the public to enjoy water safely.

Through Drowning Prevention Week, RLSS UK provides free educational resources for leisure centres and schools including pre-school, primary and secondary aged children. In 2022 over 1.25million children were educated in water safety during Drowning Prevention Week using the charity's free educational resources.

RLSS UK also shares resources widely to members of the public to ensure that everyone has the knowledge needed to keep themselves and their families safe when in and around water. In recent years the charity has produced animations to emphasise water safety advice and in 2022 2.79million people had an opportunity to view the animation on YouTube.

The campaign also engages with MPs during the week and has had great success including engaging with over 50 MPs at Westminster during 2022's event in order to raise awareness of water safety in their constituencies.



The campaign aims to give all children, no matter their background the much needed resources and skills to enjoy water safely.

**In 2022 over 1.25 million children were educated in water safety during Drowning Prevention Week using RLSS UK's free educational resources.**

## NWSF – Respect the Water (Teen and Adult)

Respect the Water (RTW) is the National Water Safety Forum’s (NWSF) public facing national water safety partnership campaign.

It aims to provide simple lifesaving advice to encourage members of the public to take personal responsibility for their own and their family’s safety, with the key message of knowing how to help other people in trouble.

If you see someone else in trouble in the water this summer, remember Call, Tell, Throw:


Call 999 – ask for Fire & Rescue if inland or the Coastguard if by the sea.

Tell the struggling person to try to float on their back.

Throw them something that floats.

Respect the Water’s 999 campaign launched on World Drowning Prevention Day (WDPD) and was developed to help reduce drownings in high-risk inland locations. This is the largest ever collaborative UK water safety campaign and is underpinned by the UK NWSF strategy objective to ‘increase awareness of everyday risks in on and around water’.

### Campaign achievements -

- 394 media outlets covering the campaign including 33 TV stations in 48 hours
- A new NWSF Respect the Water campaign website launched 
- 8m advert impacts on TV and 600k targeted impacts across catch up TV channels
- The campaign was recognised as an example of best practice globally when featured by the World Health Organisation in their UN World Drowning Prevention Day round up webinar.



## National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) – Be Water Aware (all ages)

Be Water Aware is an annual campaign developed to support the national drowning prevention strategy. The campaign has grown over six years gaining support from all UK Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and beyond.

The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of, and reduce the incidents of, accidental drowning and to ensure FRS provides advice to prevent incidents and educate the public in what to do in the event of an incident. It also ensures all FRS include this as a risk in Community Risk Management Plans and take action to support at a local level.

The campaign provides a toolkit of information to support FRS’s with consistent agreed national messaging aligned to that of water safety partners in the NWSF. This provides a basis for messaging which FRS can use throughout the year as local need arises.

An FRS WAID dashboard to support FRS understanding of incidents and fatalities in local FRS areas is available.

The campaign ensures an understanding of the issue within the FRS and the role can play in reducing drownings and the target audiences they should focus on. It also includes a local and regional project which FRS have developed including installation of throwline boards. It ensures collaboration with other water safety organisations and campaigns based on local need. It has resulted in a greater understanding from the public of the role of FRS in water rescue and as responders, and what to do if one occurs.



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council

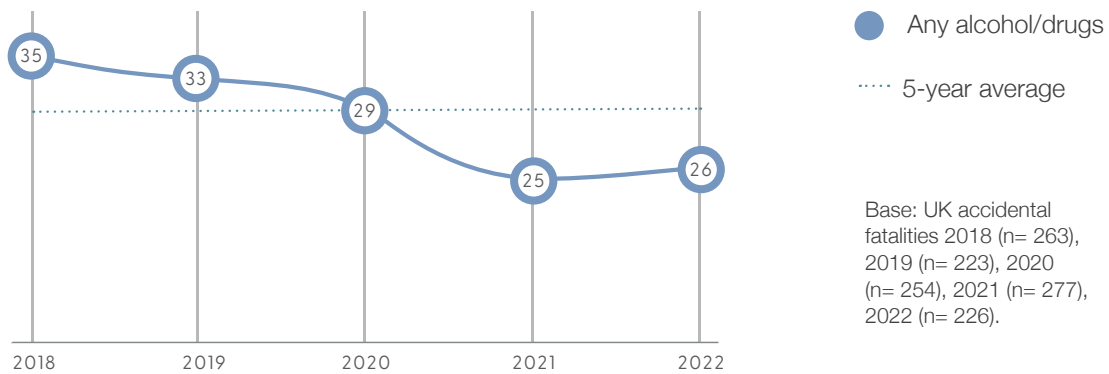
# Contributory Factors: Alcohol and/or Drugs

In 2022, the presence of alcohol and/or drugs was reported in 58/226 accidental fatalities. This represented 26% of the total and reflects a downward trend in the number of accidental fatalities that had alcohol/drugs in their system from 35% in 2018 (n=92/263).

Alcohol and drugs can be a contributory factor in accidental fatalities due to the impact they have on the body. Alcohol and drugs lower inhibitions, leading to impaired judgment, slower reactions and limiting muscle ability making simple movements much harder.

Campaigns, such as the Royal Life Saving Society UK's Don't Drink and Drown Campaign aim to raise awareness of the risk of consuming alcohol/drugs when in, on or around water. Emphasising the dangers of alcohol/drugs around, especially to those not intending to enter the water. In 2022 we saw that 67% of accidental fatalities under the influence of alcohol/drugs during 2022 had fallen unexpectedly into the water (n=39/58).

FIG. 17: % UK accidental fatalities with reported presence of alcohol/drugs



## Royal Life Saving Society UK – Don't Drink and Drown

The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) holds its Don't Drink and Drown campaign annually in September to target students who are starting or returning to university, and also in December to target an increase in Christmas partygoers.

It encourages smart decision making around water if you've been drinking. It particularly targets positive peer influence, asking individuals to be responsible for their friends if they have had too much to drink; helping them to return home safely with the key message being Be a Mate.

Each year RLSS UK staff, partners and volunteers carry out activities and events in towns and cities that have demonstrated a particularly high number of alcohol-related drownings. In previous years volunteers have offered staff who work in areas where there are bars, clubs or pubs near the water free water rescue equipment training (WRET) to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge needed to safely perform a rescue if needed. Volunteers also head out to those areas to speak with young people to encourage sensible decision making and ensure they get home safely.







**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council



## National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) – Community Responder



Following the success of the Waterside Economy Throw Bag initiative along Newcastle Quayside, RNLI and Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) developed a collaborative Waterside Responder Scheme. 261 UK venues received training with additional businesses eager to take part. Thirteen Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) currently collaborate with RNLI since the scheme launched in 2017.

Firefighter Tommy Richardson, water safety advocate, with support from Dawn Whittaker NFCC Water Safety Lead, devised and delivered the scheme to introduce 'throw bags' into pubs, clubs and businesses located on Newcastle Quayside, training their staff to respond in an emergency.

Following the success of the pilot, RNLI and TWFRS rolled out the Community Responder Scheme. RNLI supplies booklets and free throw bags to waterside businesses with TWFRS arranging and delivering training.

Educating businesses improves community safety—particularly the night time economy. Awareness of the issue and how to respond means a safe rescue can begin ahead of the FRS arriving.

To date there have been six successful, separate rescues with two venues within the UK. All of these have occurred within TWFRS service area.

Partners also devised a sign which can help members of the public identify premises that have trained staff and a throw bag on site.

Staff can give help to anyone who may have fallen in the water ahead of the emergency services arriving on scene.



# Contributory Factors: The risk of Cold-Water Shock

Cold water is considered a leading contributory factor to accidental drowning in the UK. When the water temperature is cold (i.e. lower than 15°C), sudden cooling of the skin triggers a life-threatening cascade of physiological and psychological responses. Analysis in 2022 from the Water Incident Research Hub (WIRH) shows that in 133 accidental drownings in outdoor spaces (including lakes, quarries, reservoirs, rivers, locks, canals, ponds, and the sea), cold water shock was cited in almost 2 in 5 (38%) of cases.

The term 'cold-water shock' refers to a psychophysiological response. The response includes a loss of the control of breathing (i.e. hyperventilation) leading to an increased chance of water entering the airway (i.e. mouth, nose and eventually the lungs). This cascade of responses reduces the chances of immediately swimming to safety and can increase anxiety and even induce panic.

With cold water being anything from approximately the temperature of a swimming pool and below, it is not just icy cold water that affects an individual's ability to move through water. In most cases in the UK, learning to swim is carried out in an indoor swimming pool, usually regulated around 28°C. Competence in this warmer water rarely directly translates (unless purposeful cold water habituation takes place) to colder outdoor water that in every case, no matter the air temperature, is lower than that in a pool.

The effect of cold water on the average person is likely to be enough to induce cold-water shock and inhibit swimming and self-rescue. However, cold shock peaks after 90-seconds of water entry and usually subsides after 3 to 5 minutes of immersion. This highlights the importance of safety and survival messages such as 'Float to Live' to protect the airway, wait for cold shock to subside and then deploy your survival strategy.



## RNLI – Float to Live

The RNLI's "Float to Live" campaign is an initiative aimed at reducing the number of drowning incidents in the UK and Ireland. The campaign is based on a simple but effective message – Float to Live

- Tilt your head back with ears submerged
- Relax and try to control your breathing
- Move your hands to help you stay afloat
- Once you are over the initial shock, call for help or swim to safety
- In an emergency call 999 or 112 and ask for the coastguard.

The campaign was launched in 2017, underpinned by research from the University of Portsmouth, to educate people how survive cold water shock should they find themselves in the water unexpectedly. The "Float to Live" technique is designed to help people stay calm and conserve their energy until they can be rescued or swim to safety. The multi channel campaign has used to shared the message in various formats, including TV commercials, radio adverts, posters and social media content, and has featured real-life stories of people who have survived drowning incidents by using the "Float to Live" technique.

The campaign has grown and evolved over the last six years, helping to save over 30 lives of people who have proactively contacted the RNLI to say its helped them in a real emergency. From swimmers to sailors, kayakers to bodyboarders – its clear Float to Live is a proven lifesaving campaign, and a key survival skill everyone should practise in case they ever find themselves in difficulty in the water.

[rnli.org/safety/float](https://rnli.org/safety/float)



# 06

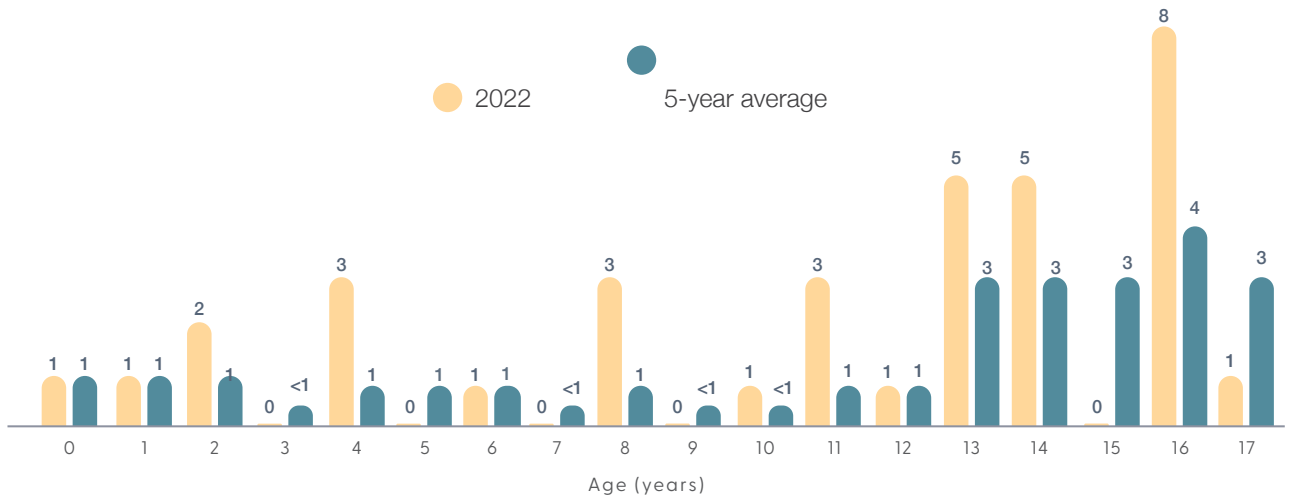
## IN FOCUS:

### ACCIDENTAL FATALITIES IN CHILDREN: A longer term analysis

Earlier in the report, it was highlighted that in 2022, 35 accidental fatalities were reported amongst children aged under 18 years. This represents a concerning increase on the 5-year average of 24.

In 2022, an increase in the number of accidental fatalities amongst children was evidenced across ages, with uplifts reported across both younger and older children.

FIG.18: Number of UK accidental fatalities in children aged under 18 years 2018-2022 by age

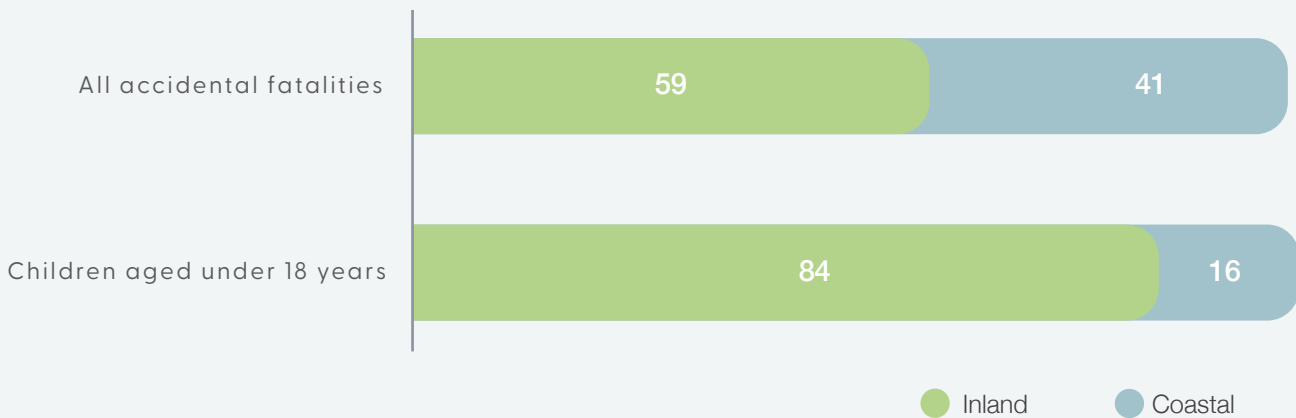


Base: UK accidental fatalities in children aged 0-17 years 2022 (n=35), 2018-2022 (n=119).

This section of the report explores more about what we know about accidental fatalities amongst children, that can help build a deeper understanding of what mitigations might be possible to reduce and prevent further fatalities.

In the last 5 years, there were 119 accidental fatalities amongst children. More than 8 in 10 of these occurred inland (84%, n=85/101), 16% occurred on the coast (16%, n=16/101). In addition, there were a further n=18 accidental fatalities of children in other locations, including the bath, swimming pool and in a water container.

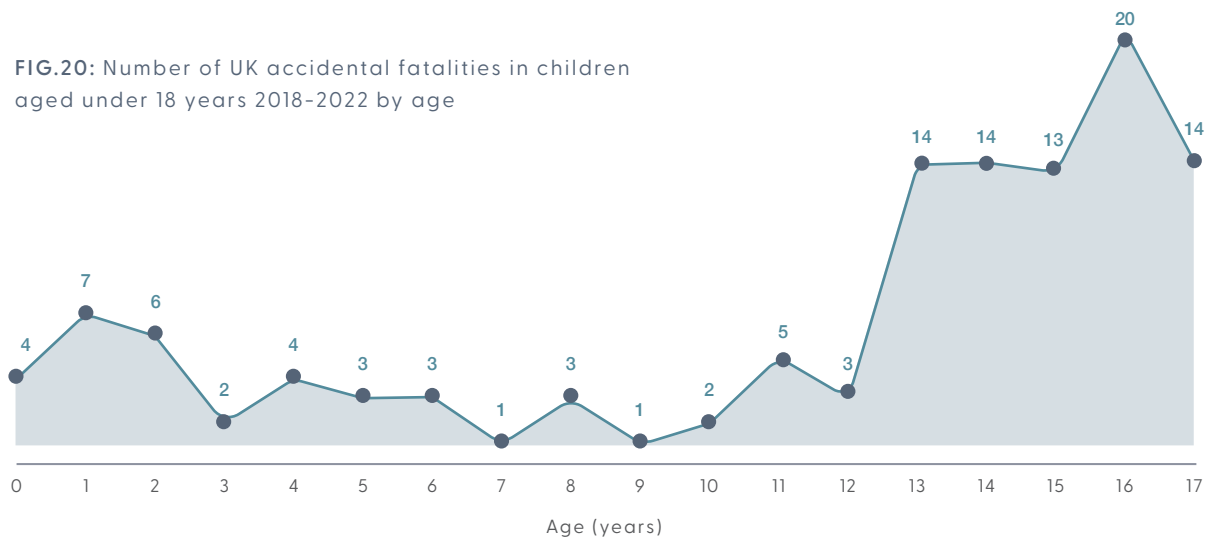
FIG. 19: UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities 2018-2022



Inland and Coastal split is as follows: 'Inland' includes canal/aqueduct, dry ground, drain/well, lake/loch/lough, marsh, pond, quarry, reservoir, river, stream/ditch/burn. 'Coastal' includes at sea, harbour/dock, coast/shore/beach. Excluded are bath, pool (swimming) and water container. Base: UK inland and coastal accidental fatalities 2018-2022, total (n= 1,191), children aged 0-17 years (n= 101).

These accidental fatalities occurred across ages; however, we see a sharp increase in the number of children losing their lives when they reach adolescence.

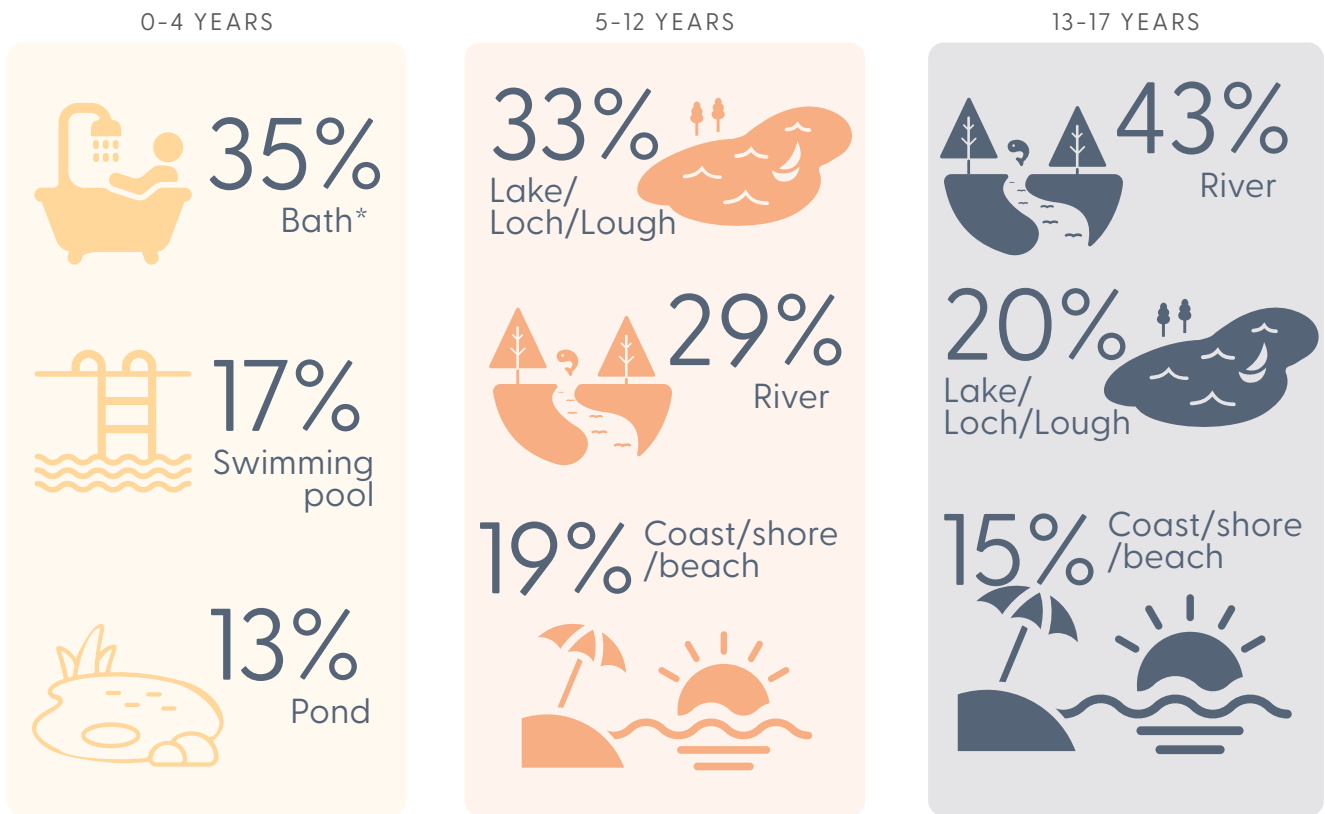
FIG.20: Number of UK accidental fatalities in children aged under 18 years 2018-2022 by age



Base: UK accidental fatalities in children under 18 years, 2018-2022 (n= 119).

The risks faced by children in, on and around water evolve as they grow. We analysed accidental fatalities amongst children in three groups, to explore the risks associated with each and understand where interventions may be needed.

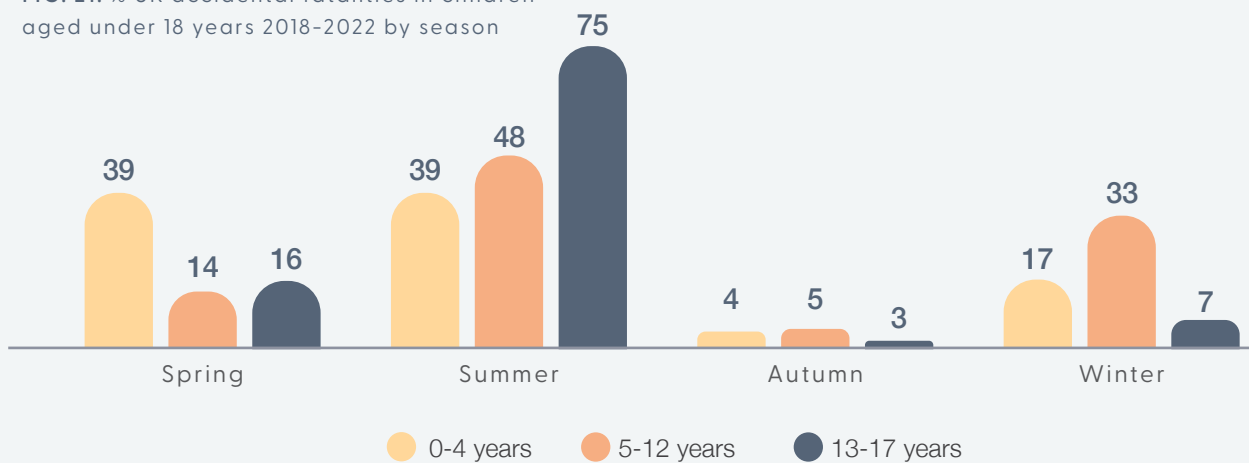
Most common locations for child accidental fatalities by age.



Base: UK accidental fatalities 2018-2022 0-4 years (n=23), 5-12 years (n=21), 13-17 years (n=75) \* including hot-tub/jacuzzi

Accidental child fatalities by time of year.

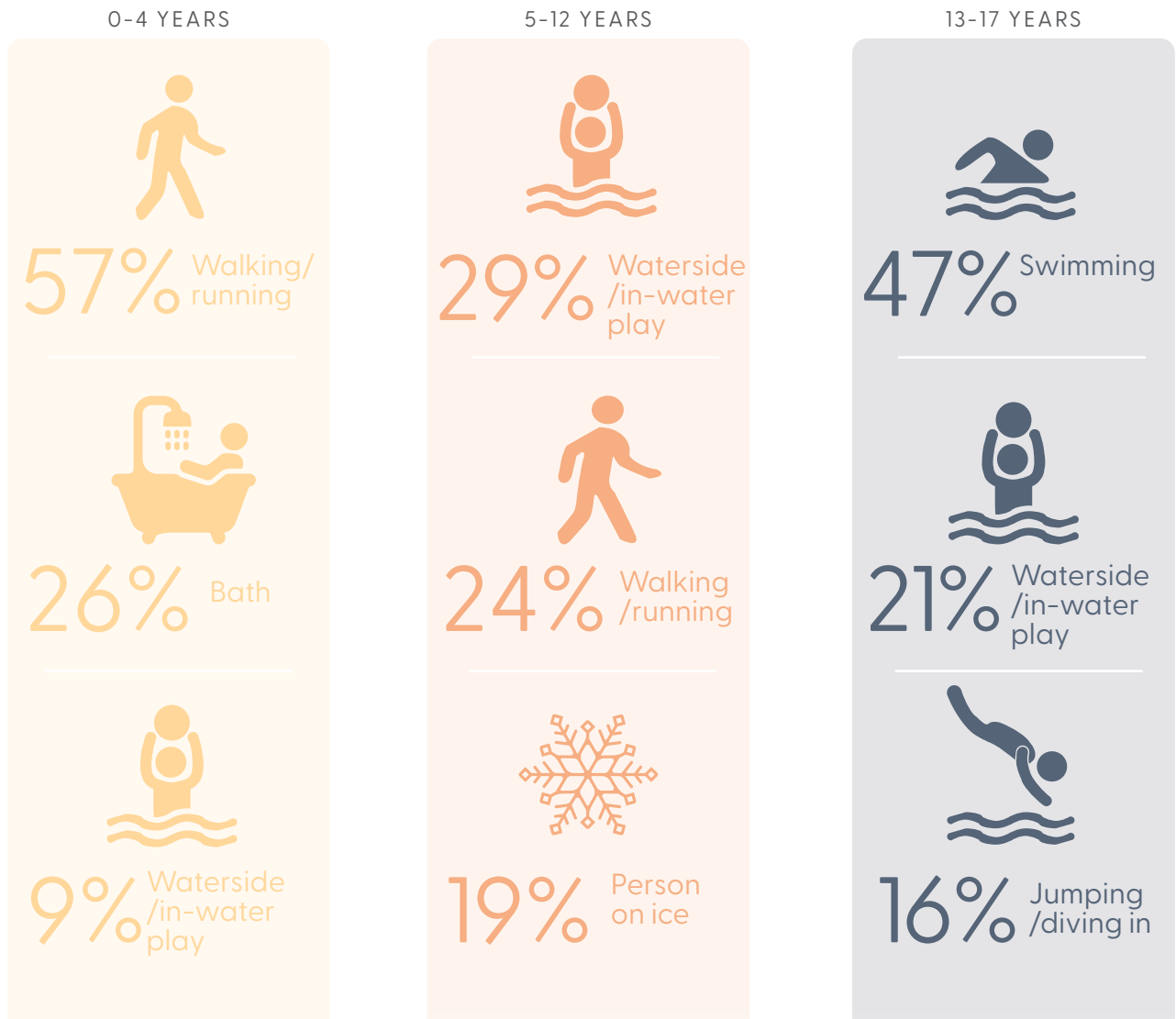
FIG. 21: % UK accidental fatalities in children aged under 18 years 2018-2022 by season



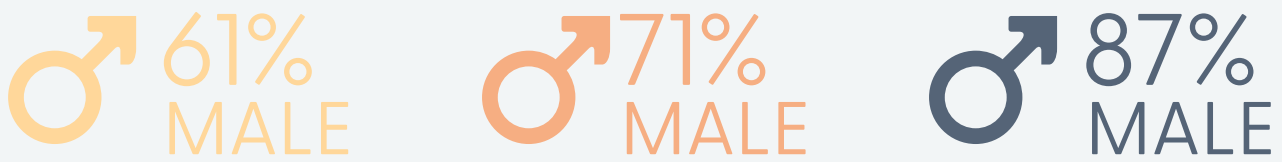
Base: UK accidental fatalities 2018-2022 0-4 years (n=23), 5-12 years (n=21), 13-17 years (n=75)

Months are grouped as follows: **Spring:** March, April, May. **Summer:** June, July, August. **Autumn:** September, October, November. **Winter:** December, January, February.

Most frequently reported activities at the time of child accidental fatalities by age.



Reported sex of child accidental fatalities.



Base: UK accidental fatalities 2018-2022 0-4 years (n=23), 5-12 years (n=21), 13-17 years (n=75)

Water Babies (0-5 years)



Water Babies is the world's largest baby swimming school, teaching over 50,000 babies, toddlers and early years children every week. Water Babies' mission is to give children the best start in life, providing them with water confidence.

Children aged 0-4 years old.

There were 23 accidental fatalities amongst children aged 0-4 years old during the period 2018-2022. This represents 19% of the total number of accidental fatalities amongst children (23/119). 3 in 5 (61% n=14/23) were male.

The most common locations for accidental fatalities to occur amongst children aged 0-4 years were the bath (35% n=8/23), the swimming pool (17% n= 4/23) and pond (13% n= 3/23). The majority (61% n=14/23) of these occurred in the home, including all fatalities in the bath (n=8) and pond (n=3), 2 reported swimming pool fatalities and 1 in a water container.

Children aged 0-4 years mostly enter the water by accident. 74% of reported fatalities between 2018 and 2022 were said to occur where the child had fallen into the water unexpectedly (n=17/23). This highlights the importance of continued supervision of young children around all bodies water, and to ensure that homes are adapted to minimise the risk of drowning.

Children learning key water safety skills is at the heart of the 0 to 5 programme and forms a key part of every lesson. The third highest cause of accidental death in children in the UK is drowning, so it's crucial that little ones understand water safety. From day one, children learn how to enter and exit the pool safely and learn techniques that will one day save a life. Babies aged between birth to 12 months old learn how to hold on to the side of the pool, and the basics of how to respond in an emergency situation. By the time they graduate at five years old, they'll not only be to save themselves, but be able to demonstrate how to help a friend in danger and recognise the safety flags at the beach.



Every year Water Babies launches its summer safety campaign, sharing advice on how to enjoy the water safely, outside of lessons. It provides water safety advice at home, poolside, beaches, pools, in a paddling pool and more. In 2022, the campaign:

- Delivered RLSS UK's Drowning Prevention Week specific lessons to up to 50,000 children
- Reached over 2 million people on Facebook and 900,000 people on Instagram with summer safety advice
- Created the top eight summer safety tips for families
- Shared summer safety tips for families, reaching over 145 million people in national publications

Water Babies is dedicated to supporting children understand key skills to enjoy the water safely.



SCAN ME for  
at home water  
safety advice



## Children aged 5-12 years old

There were 21 accidental fatalities amongst children aged 5-12 years old between 2018 and 2022. This equates to 18% of the total number of child fatalities (21/119) during this period. 71% (n=15/21) were male.

Unlike the younger age group, most children aged between 5 and 12 years old lost their life outdoors: 33% in a lake/loch/lough (n=7), 29% in a river (n=6) and 19% on the coast/shore/beach (n=4). 14% (n=3) of accidental fatalities amongst children in this age group occurred in the bath at home.

As children grow in independence and start to spend more time outdoors, equipping them with the safety knowledge and skills to stay safe in, on and around water could play a critical role in helping to prevent further drownings of children in UK waterways.

In December 2022, four children aged between 6 and 11 years old lost their lives after falling through the ice in Babbs Lake, Solihull. Children who fall into cold water are likely to cool very quickly as they have a small body volume relative to a large body surface area. This makes short-term incapacitation by cold and hypothermia likely to occur more quickly. This incident acts as a reminder that open water poses risks to children all year around and that timely, relevant water safety education is an important step towards minimising the likelihood of this type of occurrence in the future.

Swimming and water safety has been a statutory element of the English national curriculum for physical education (PE) programme since 1994. Outcomes include being able to swim 25m and be competent to self-rescue from a lake by the time they start secondary school. Whilst this guidance aims to provide children with the skills they need to stay safe in, on and around water, more than a quarter of all year 7 children in England (28%)<sup>7</sup> are failing to meet the required standards and there are significant variations in the likelihood to achieve these outcomes based the ethnic and social background of the child.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Sports England Active Lives Survey (2021/22)



### Royal Life Saving Society UK – Rookie Lifeguard



The Royal Life Saving Society UK's (RLSS UK) Rookie Lifeguard programme is designed for children from eight to 12 years old to give them the skills they need to be confident in the water. The programme is taught using colourful materials, and fun, varied lifesaving rescue activities to ensure they know how to stay safe in both shallow and deep water.

Rookie Lifeguard teaches children survival, rescue and sport skills and can run alongside swimming lessons to enhance their skills in the pool. It is a great opportunity for children to get involved with lifesaving, explore water safely, and learn skills that they can take with them as they progress to further awards or programmes. For many children the Rookie Lifeguard programme is the first opportunity for them to learn lifesaving skills which help them to gain independence and confidence. In 2022 more than 48,000 Rookie Lifeguards started their journey on the RLSS UK's pathway, increasing the number of younger children learning vital lifesaving skills.

The programme is part of the Learn to Swim programme, although can also be run as a stand-alone course by lifesaving clubs, leisure centres, swimming schools and as part of school swimming lessons. The Rookie Lifeguard programme fulfils all of the eight to 11-year-olds water safety objectives of the Health and Wellbeing requirements of national curricula.

### Children aged 13-17 years old.

There were 75 accidental fatalities amongst children aged 13-17 years between 2018 and 2022. This represents 63% of the total child accidental fatalities (75/119) during this period.

Three-quarters (75% n=56/75) of accidental fatalities in this age group took place in the summer months. Those aged 13-17 years are most likely to have lost their lives in inland open water, notably rivers (43% n=32/75) and lakes (20% n=15/75). Children aged 13-17 years old are also much more likely than younger children to be actively entering the water, primarily to swim (47%, n=35/75), or take part in other water activities. In 69% of cases, children aged 13-17 years became tired and/or overwhelmed by the water, suggesting that children may be over-estimating their abilities (n=52/75). A separate analysis of n=120 cases of accidental drowning amongst children 13-17 years has shown that 71% (n=85/120) were swimmers<sup>8</sup>.

At the coast, children often benefit from lifeguard supervision. In 2022, RNLI lifeguards aided 3,492 children aged 13-17 years old. In inland open water, children rarely benefit from professional lifeguard supervision. Analysis shows that in 89 cases of inland accidental drowning of children aged 13-17, 78% were unsupervised (n=69/89). Ensuring children have access to water safety education to drive awareness of the additional risks of swimming or playing in open outdoor water is vital.

87% of accidental fatalities amongst children aged 13-17 years were male (65/75). In addition, in analysis of 120 cases of children aged 13-17 that accidentally drowned, over half (52% n=62/120) were accompanied only by friends.<sup>8</sup> More research is needed to explore how male adolescent behaviour and the influence of peers impacts risk in, on and around water. This includes further exploration of peer targeted campaigns and peer education models as a potentially effective method to influence behaviour at this critical age.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Water Incident Research Hub (WIRH), 2023



## Swim England - Swim Safe and Learn to Swim



Swim Safe is an experiential water safety programme aimed at giving seven to 14 year olds the opportunity to apply the water safety knowledge and skills learned

in indoor school swimming and water safety lessons, as well as private learn to swim lessons, in an outdoors environment. The aim is to give them real world experience of applying the water safety code and experience the challenges of performing self-rescue skills in outdoors water. The programme, supported by the RNLI and delivered by local delivery partners in their communities, saw more than 12,000 participants in 2022 with 99% of participants being able to recall key messages from the water safety code as well as participating in self-rescue practice in the water.



### Learn to Swim

Learn to swim goes from strength to strength with over two million young people taking part in programmes in England. The Swim England Learn to Swim Programme (LTSP) has seen greater uptake of the complimentary Water Safety Awards alongside the core information and skills that are delivered as part of every lesson. The aim of the LTSP is to increase the nation's capability, giving people the skills and knowledge to safely enjoy activities in, on and around the water.



## Royal Life Saving Society UK - National Lifesaving Academy (NLA)



The NLA was launched in 2022 as a programme to provide skills for life which include beach, pool and open water elements.

The progressive awards teach those aged 12 and over personal survival, first aid, CPR, rescue, and fitness skills. The aim of the programme is to teach young people how to stay safe around water and how to safely assist others who may have gotten into difficulty in both aquatic and non-aquatic situations.

The NLA programme does not only ensure that children feel confident with their swimming ability, but also ensures that in different environments such as open water and at the beach, not just a warm swimming pool, they would have the skills and knowledge to enjoy water safely.

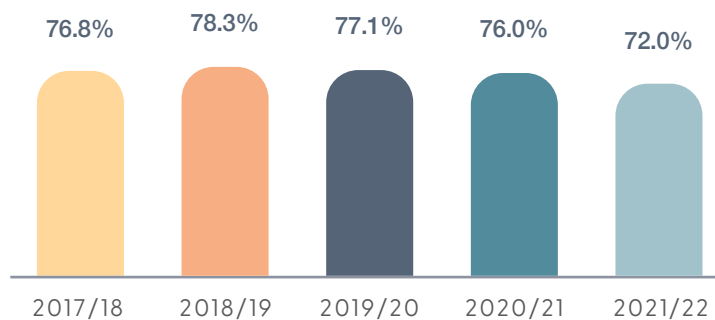
The programme has been endorsed by gold medal Olympians and GB triathletes Jonny and Alistair Brownlee, as well as Paralympian Ellie Robinson, and Olympian and Sports Scientist Professor Greg Whyte.

The NLA is also a great opportunity for young people to gain experience and skills needed for future employment as the programme offers recognised prior learning hours towards RLSS UK's vocational lifeguard qualifications to allow young people to progress not only personally but within their career too, all whilst learning vital lifesaving skills.

### Statutory Swimming And Water Safety Education (England Only)

Data from the Sport England Active Lives survey suggests that, in 2021/22 at the end of Key Stage 2, only 72.0% of children were achieving the statutory outcome of being able to swim 25m. This has declined significantly since 2017/18 from 76.8%. This data illustrates that in 2021/22 approximately 134,500 children in England were unable to swim 25m by age 11, an increase of more than 23,000 children compared to 2017/18.

FIG. 22: % of year 7 children in England reported to be able to swim 25m by year 7



Source: Sport England Active Lives Data



## Pool closures and lack of swimming provision

Many pool operators faced a rise in energy costs of up to 150% in 2022, threatening a reduction in swimming pool programmes, and even the closure of vital community pools. Over 100 UK pools are predicted to close or reduce service by the summer of 2023, following a period that saw over 400 pools close since 2010.

Over 70% of primary schools rely upon public swimming pools to deliver their statutory duty for swimming lessons and without these pools there is an even bigger gap in swimming provisions for children and potentially an increase in drownings.

Whilst Government support to keep pools open was welcomed, the sector is still concerned that in the long term, this will simply delay the inevitable closure of pools, a scenario that makes the teaching of swimming at affordable rates challenging. Further leading to potential public safety concerns and a generational gap in swimming standards that could see more drowning incidents.

## Active Black Country/Speedo Swim United Pop-up Pools

Shocking statistics demonstrate that 5 in 10 (i.e. 10,197) children in the Black Country are leaving primary school each year unable to swim 25m, and over half (i.e. 10,537) of Year 6 pupils can't demonstrate a safe self-rescue. These figures are set to increase without intervention.

Speedo Swim United's pop-up pool programme sees pop-up pools located at targeted schools within the Black Country. The schools have been selected using Active Black Country's school swimming insight and based on need.

The programme aims to provide up to 1,000 pupils with an additional four hours of swimming per week over a four-month period. Qualified lifeguards and swimming teachers will work with school pupils - for 5.5 hours Monday to Friday during term time - to ensure they understand how to self-rescue in water and with the aim of teaching each child to swim at least 25 metres.

At the start of the programme, baseline data showed for children on the programme that:

- 16.8% could swim 25m unaided
- 3.7% could use a range of strokes effectively
- 5.3% could perform water safety skills (safe self-rescue)

The programme is committed to ensuring children and their families continue their swimming journey beyond the end of the project, and programme partners will subsequently be working closely with each Local Authority in the Black Country to create clear pathways to local swimming pools.

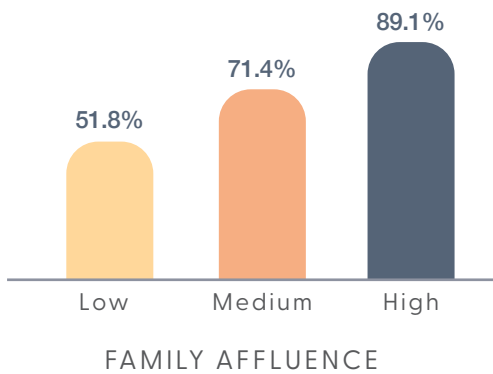


The data from the Active Lives survey highlights not only the significant number of children in England who are not achieving statutory outcomes, but also the groups that are most at risk.

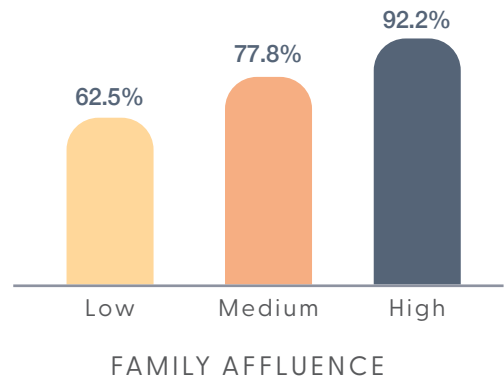
By conducting a review of the data over the period 2020-22 for robustness, we can draw attention to the groups falling most behind in these core water competencies.

**Children from low-income families** are less likely to be able to achieve the statutory outcomes for Year 7 compared to those from medium and high-income families. Only 51.8% of children from low-income families can swim 25m by Year 7, compared to 89.1% for high-income families. Similarly, 62.5% of children from low-income families can self-rescue, compared to 92.2% for high-income families.

**FIG. 23:** % Children in year 7 in England able to swim 25m by family affluence



**FIG. 24:** % Children in year 7 in England able to self rescue by family affluence



Source: Sport England Active Lives Data 2020-22

The Active Lives data also highlights similar disparities in achieving the statutory outcomes by ethnic group, with children from an ethnic minority, in particular Asian and Black groups, are less likely to be able to swim 25m by the end of Key Stage 2 or have the competence to self-rescue. For example, 56.9% of Asian and 57.3% of Black children in Year 7 can swim 25m unaided, compared to 79.8% for White British children. 68.1% of Asian and 64.7% of Black children in Year 7 can self-rescue, compared to 84.4% for White British children.

FIG. 25: % children in year 7 in England able to swim 25m by ethnicity

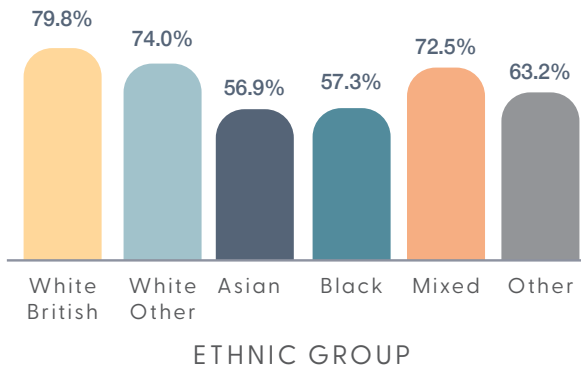
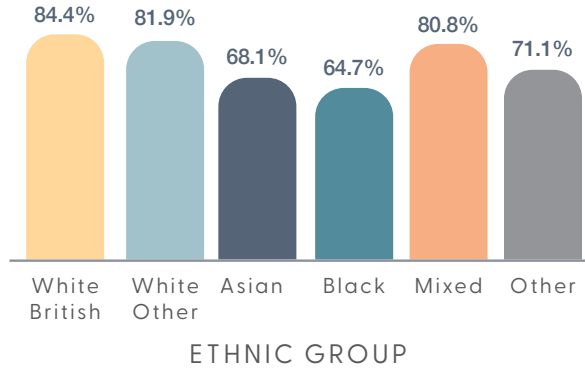


FIG. 26: % Children in year 7 in England able to self rescue by ethnicity



Source: Sport England Active Lives Data 2020-22



## Black Owned Swim School (B.O.S.S)

In 2022 B.O.S.S lifesaving summer delivered a drowning prevention programme in two separate urban, open water areas to raise awareness for some of the most vulnerable populations associated with drowning in the UK.

It was open to 20 families in the West Midlands of various abilities and ages, who wanted to experience navigating water in unfamiliar/challenging territory, while having fun.

A group of 20 people also took part in London, learning open water safety and kayaking as part of a progressive pathway for swimmers who attended from the age of eight-years-old.

The attendees achieved a 50m open water swim and learned lifesaving skills with rewarding activities for all ages. The spaces were also accessible for young wheelchair users and elder members with mobility issues to enjoy with friends and family members. Both locations were available in safely supervised, public spaces.

The teenagers were surprised that these facilities were so local but also conscious of the lack of regular and consistent opportunities to feel welcome to participate in such activities due to funding and/or outreach.

Represented at aquatics governance groups, B.O.S.S has continued to explore how to make swimming and water safety education more accessible and as to why people of Black and majority ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately represented in drowning numbers.



B.O.S.S is working to establish a space for Black and majority ethnic groups to access public pool space nationally.

This includes working with academies and colleges where students (16yrs +) gain life skills and qualifications to train and develop professionally in aquatics and leisure.



“I can dip myself under the water without getting scared”

## Black Swimming Association (BSA)

Research shows that there are significant, multi-faceted barriers to aquatic activity for ethnically diverse communities, which have lower levels of water safety knowledge and core aquatic skills than white peers.

The BSA created a programme called Together We Can © that takes place over five weeks. It is designed to help ethnically diverse communities overcome complex barriers to engaging in aquatic activity, enabling people to be safer in and around water.

The programme places emphasis on water safety, with the primary aim being water familiarisation and orientation; the secondary aim is to enable participants to explore their potential and prepare them to engage with the aquatic sector (e.g. through learn-to-swim programmes).



73 participants engaged in rotations 1-7, which took place between August 2021 and November 2022.

For these participants, the following impact was seen:

- All participants had little or no water safety knowledge at the start of the programme, but by the end all of the participants were water safety aware
- The lack of water safety knowledge at the beginning demonstrates the importance of the programme and the danger of empowering an individual's sense of swimming achievement without also providing water safety education
- The aim that 40% of participants would engage in further activity was far exceeded in all rotations, demonstrating the effectiveness of the programme in instilling pro-aquatic behaviours

Quotes from participants also demonstrate the benefits:

- “You don't feel like anybody's judging you, because everyone's journey is different”
- “I'm amazed how much I've got out of this in such a short space of time”
- “I can dip myself under the water without getting scared”
- “I definitely have learnt so much to help me stay safe in the water and around it”

The programme is delivering against its objectives to provide:

- Vital water safety education
- Foster pro-aquatic behaviours
- Developing lifesaving aquatic skills

This report was sponsored by The Wetsuit Factory (TWF)



The Wetsuit Factory (TWF) are proud to partner with The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) by sponsoring The Water Safety All Parliamentary Party Group (APPG) presentation of the UK drowning report 2022.

Being an island nation we feel that it is vitally important that everyone should know how to swim and be safe around the water. As such we support the call for water safety education to be compulsory throughout our education system.

Since 1969 TWF have strived to educate end users to ensure that everyone can enjoy the water safely. We are proud to have been the first company to use our swing tags to spread key information about beach flags, what to do in an emergency and encourage people to visit a lifeguarded beach. These tags reached almost 500,000 users in 2022.

We use our Facebook and Instagram pages to raise awareness and provide education applicable to both inland and coastal waters. Topics include drowning prevention, rip-tides, currents and cold water shock. RLSS UK align with our values and our partnership will allow us both to spread the water safety message further and wider.

The Water Safety APPG was implemented to establish more accessible water safety education across the UK to prevent future drownings. We hope that the report will raise awareness and gain support for the Water Safety (Curriculum) Bill.

Going forward we would like to see materials and lessons readily available and accessible in all schools. This will ensure children from all backgrounds are aware of the dangers for themselves and others. They should be able to confidently self-rescue allowing them to be safe in, around and on all types of water.

#### Notes

This data analysis is based on the official releases of WAID data as found online on the National Water Safety Forum Website. It should be noted that the core data providers continue to improve verification and completeness of records starting in 2012 which results in an improved record set.

The Water Incident Research Hub (WIRH) aims to improve access to water incident data, aquatic safety, and research. It has published over 150 'help' pages and articles supporting aquatic safety professionals and archived 600 cases, each containing 200+ data points collected from 10,000+ public records relating to UK water incidents between 1993-2023.



Access to the  
WAID data

## Contributions

This is a Water Safety APPG Report, authored by the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) and supported by the National Water Safety Forum.

A special thanks to all the individuals and groups who every day dedicate their time and expertise to help reduce UK drowning and aid the general public to enjoy water safely.

For their contribution to the report, we are grateful for the input from:

The Water Safety APPG Chair and his team  
The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) and contributing members  
Water Safety Scotland (WSS) and contributing members  
Water Safety Wales (WSW) and contributing members  
The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)  
Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)  
The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)  
Canal & River Trust  
Water Babies  
Swim England  
Black Owned Swim School (B.O.S.S)  
Black Swimming Association (BSA)  
British Canoeing  
National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC)  
Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS)  
Active Black Country  
Speedo and Pentland  
The Water Incident Research Hub  
Leeds Trinity University

An extraordinary thank you to the sponsors of the report – The Wetsuit Factory whose developing partnership with RLSS UK is another leading example that will aid the dissemination of critical water safety education.

Finally, to all those families who have had to deal with the sudden and devastating loss as an impact of drowning. Your strength to navigate your loss and actively encourage improvements is much needed and does not go unnoticed – thank you.

APPG National Drowning Report UK 2022 authored by  
the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK).

RLSS UK is a registered charity which provides expert  
lifesaving education in the UK and Ireland, protecting  
families from the sudden and devastating impact of  
drowning.

[www.rlss.org.uk](http://www.rlss.org.uk)

