



Water Risk and Drowning Prevention in Nepal

The context

Drowning is an abrupt, [silent and shocking incident](#), people often do not realise it happening until it's too late. Unlike other health conditions, drowning has a short span between life and death. A small [child can suddenly slip](#) into a pond, pool or a [bucket full of water](#). Likewise, some people want to swim into water after a few drinks at a picnic spot by the river. Not using a lifejacket when boarding on a boat is very risky but it is hardly practiced, even [traveling on an overcrowded boat](#). Simply not covering a bucket full of water or a drain nearby home can be fatal if toddlers fall into them. So much can happen in a single moment. We have to go a long way to raise awareness and actions for the prevention of such drowning. At the global stage, the [United Nations Resolution \(2021\) sets out urgent actions on drowning prevention](#) for all countries and UN agencies and at the country level the onus is on the Ministry of Health and Population. This document describes key facts about drowning in Nepal and aims to inform stakeholders and the public with the goal of facilitating a specific course of action to save lives from drowning.

The Magnitude

Drowning is the leading cause of deaths for the children aged 1-4 years followed by those aged 5-9 years. Even if someone doesn't die from drowning, they may be suffering brain damage that leads to problems with learning, memory, and even basic life skills. According to a [WHO South East Asia report](#), drowning mortality rates in the Region are much higher than the global average, for both men and women and in every age group. According to the Regional Drowning Status Report (2022), the South East Asia countries lost 70,034 people from drowning in the year 2019. Nepal has the third highest age standardized death rate due to drowning (5.4 per 100,000) which is equivalent to nearly 1,600 fatal drowning in that year. In Nepal, [over half of all drowning deaths](#) occur among the population aged less than 20 years. Almost 80% of all drowning occur in rivers and 18% is combined for ponds, canals and water-ditches.

Challenges and Barriers

Nepal has abundant open water resources, including rivers, rivulets, tributaries, gorges, as well as lakes, ponds, and artificial reservoirs. Due to absence of household water supplies, bridges and poor construction safety people are exposed to risky water environments. [Drowning often occurs during daily household chores such as bathing, river crossing, and fishing](#). The escalating frequency of climate change-induced events has also led to a corresponding increase in water-related hazards, resulting in floods, landslides, fatalities, and property loss. In 2023 alone, [Nepal experienced a surge in such incidents](#), with 156 flood events affecting 3,700 families, 175 heavy rain episodes impacting 300 families, and 494 landslides displacing 2,000 families. Even though there are a lot of people who have been affected or drowned, efforts to stop are insufficient because people don't understand how dangerous water can be. Teaching people to swim and how to stay safe in water can help save lives. Lack of a national or local strategic plan for drowning prevention and institutional arrangement is another challenge.

Some practical measures to avoid drowning incidents

- Supervise children while they are near open water or stored water vessels.
- Avoid consuming alcohol or drugs before entering water
- Refrain from entering rivers or water bodies during darkness.
- Supervise children closely near water when visiting unfamiliar locations, such as relatives' villages or a tourist area.
- Putting on a lifejacket when fishing or boating or using waterways



- Enter into water only if you know how to swim or float
- Impose restrictions on unaccompanied swimming
- Ensure the ponds, rainwater collection pits and swimming pools are fenced and access controlled
- Maintain a updates on weather forecasts, especially throughout the monsoon

Evidence-based Recommendations

As suggested by the World Health Organization, there are six evidence-based, low-cost drowning prevention interventions that countries and organizations can implement to significantly reduce the risk of drowning.

जल जोखिमबाट बच्न विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठनद्वारा सिफारिस रोकथामका उपायहरू



Train bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation

प्रत्यक्षदर्शिलाई उद्धार र पुनर्जीवन सीपको तालिम दिनुहोस्



Install barriers controlling access to water

बारबन्देज लगाएर पानीको स्रोतमा पहुँच नियन्त्रण गर्नुहोस्



Set and enforce safe boating, shipping and ferry regulations

डुंगा र जलयातायात सम्बन्धि नियम बनाई लागू गर्नुहोस्



Provide safe places away from water for pre-school children, with capable child care

पाँच वर्षमुनिका बालबालिकालाई पानीको स्रोतभन्दा टाढा उचित रेखदेखसहित सुरक्षित स्थानको व्यवस्था गर्नुहोस्



Improve flood risk management locally and nationally

स्थानीय र राष्ट्रियस्तरमा बाढी जोखिम व्यवस्थापनमा सुधार गर्नुहोस्



Teach school age children basic swimming, water safety and safe rescue skills

स्कूल जाने उमेर-समुहका बालबालिकालाई आधारभूत पौडी, जल-सुरक्षा र सुरक्षित उद्धार सीप सिकाउनुहोस्

स्रोत: विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन

#DrowningPrevention

#WorldDrowningPreventionDay

Government's Role

- Develop or announce a new drowning prevention policy, strategy or legislation
- Convene a national multisectoral roundtable on drowning and its prevention
- Commit to support a drowning prevention programme domestically or internationally
- Strengthen advocacy for government-led drowning prevention efforts
- Investigate how international drowning prevention efforts can be supported in Nepal

References

a) WHO Southeast Asia (2022). Status of drowning in South-East Asia: Country reports. WHO Southeast Asia Regional Office. New Delhi. b) Sedain and Pant. (2018). Status of drowning in Nepal: A study of central police data. *F1000Research*, 7:576. c) Bidya Rai (2023). [Inattention Crushes Young Buds Kantipur \(Nepali\)](#), 01 Jun 2023. d) [Nepal Disaster Risk Reduction Portal](#) (Accessed 15 Jul 2024)