

Swim to Survive™

In pursuit of its mission to eliminate drowning and water-related injury in Canada, the Lifesaving Society articulates and promotes its official positions on issues to improve aquatic safety across the country. In Canada's water-rich environment, minimum swimming ability is a required life skill for survival.

Lifesaving Society Position Statement

- Acquisition of basic swimming ability is a fundamental requirement in any meaningful attempt to eliminate drowning in Canada.
- All Canadian children deserve the chance to learn basic swim survival skills.
- The acquisition of basic swim survival skills by Canadian children is worthy of public and government support.
- Affordable training should be available for all children to the level of the *Canadian Swim to Survive Standard*.

Lifesaving Society Canadian Swim to Survive Standard – A minimum national standard of swimming skill for everyone. The *Canadian Swim to Survive Standard* is simple, straightforward and focused. It defines the essential minimum skills required to survive an unexpected fall into deep water. It is recognized that there is a wide range of aquatic training well beyond this minimum.

The Swim to Survive Standard is: Roll into deep water, tread water for 1 minute and then swim 50m to safety - the swim should be completed without the use of aids, standing on the bottom or stopping to hold onto the wall for turns. Any method of support and swim movement is acceptable.

1. The entry – Orient oneself at the surface after an unexpected entry.	During a fall into the water, the person is usually disoriented by the rolling or tumbling entry. He/she must be able to get his head above the surface and avoid breathing water.
2. Support oneself at the surface – Able to tread water for 1 minute.	Most Canadian waters are cold enough to trigger cold shock as a result of immersion in the water. The person's initial response to cold shock is uncontrolled gasping. If the person is underwater during the cold shock response, they will breathe water and probably drown. The ability to tread water allows the victim to protect his airway while waiting to regain conscious control of his breathing. Treading water also allows him to look around and decide how to get to a point of safety.

3. Swim to safety – Swim 50 metres.	The Lifesaving Society's research shows that most drownings occur only 3 to 15 metres away from a point of safety such as a pool edge, dock or the shore. The person must be able to swim to safety while retaining the ability to control his breathing. Because the person's ability may be impaired by cold or clothing, the Society uses a 50 metre distance as a testing standard.
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Rationale

High participation in swimming as a recreational activity

- Among school-aged children between 5 and 12 years of age, swimming is the second most popular activity in Canada after bicycling.
- Among those over 18 years of age, swimming is the third most popular activity after walking and gardening/yard work. Source: *1998 Physical Activity Monitor*, Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.

Drowning is a leading cause of death

- Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death after motor vehicle crashes in Canada for people 55 years of age and under.
- Year after year, the majority of people who drown have no intention of going into the water. Immersion is sudden and unexpected.

Need for instruction

- Swim skills need to be taught. Swim skills are not innate; they are acquired. Swim skills are very difficult to self-teach.
- During the 1990s, boards of education withdrew from providing basic swim instruction to elementary school children. This instruction needs to be replaced at the community level.