

## WHO urges countries to invest in drowning prevention to protect children

29 November 2022 - On World Drowning Prevention Day this year, WHO is releasing an investment case on drowning prevention showing how just two actions – investing in day care for pre-school aged children and teaching basic swim skills to school-age children – could protect millions of lives. Each dollar invested in these actions can yield benefits up to nine times the original value.

Drowning is an underappreciated but lethal public health issue. It has caused over 2.5 million deaths in the last decade, with an alarming 90% of these fatalities occurring in low- and middle-income countries. Across all age groups, children aged 1–4 years and 5–9 years experience the highest drowning rates, highlighting the need for immediate action to protect future generations.

Yet effective solutions exist. The new investment case shows that by 2050, increased global investment in just two measures could save the lives of over 774 000 children, prevent close to 1 million non-fatal child drownings, and avert severe and life-limiting injuries for 178 000 drowning victims.

It could also prevent potential economic losses of over US\$400 billion in low- and middle-income countries with high burden, and provide cumulative benefits valued at around US\$ 9 for each US\$ 1 invested. Countries such as Bangladesh, South Africa, Thailand and Vietnam have already invested in these cost-effective interventions, benefitting children and their families by reducing their risk of drowning, while simultaneously providing new opportunities for improved health, development and wellbeing.

“By implementing effective preventive measures, increasing investments, and promoting awareness, we can save countless lives,” said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. «As we observe World Drowning Prevention Day today, we ask countries and partners to join hands to make drowning prevention a global priority.”

In May 2023, the World Health Assembly (WHA) adopted its first-ever resolution on drowning prevention. This resolution invites WHO to lead efforts within the United Nations system to prevent drowning and facilitate the observance of World Drowning Prevention Day on July 25th each year.

As requested in the WHA resolution, WHO is launching the Global Alliance for Drowning Prevention. The Alliance is a network of partners who will work together to coordinate, strengthen, enhance, and expand efforts to prevent drowning deaths, aligned with WHO’s priorities. The Alliance operates under the principles of alignment and coordination, agility and responsiveness, driving country-level action, transparency, evidence-based approaches, and coordination among interested parties.

“Over the past decade, drowning has killed more than 2.5 million people,” said Michael R. Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg LP and Bloomberg Philanthropies and World Health Organization Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and Injuries. “Bloomberg Philanthropies has been working with our partners to implement proven life-saving solutions, like teaching basic swimming survival skills and providing child care. Now, by bringing together governments and partners from around the world, we can help spread this work and save many more lives.”

WHO is also preparing a global status report on drowning prevention to better understand the impact of drowning and analyze government actions worldwide. The global status report will provide critical information for policy-makers and programme managers to catalyze more action to implement low-cost, scalable and effective drowning prevention interventions recommended by WHO, with all 194 Member States invited to participate.

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