Cold Water Survival Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. The danger of cold-water survival primarily stems from the rapid loss of body heat and the risk of hypothermia. When exposed to cold water, the body’s heat is quickly transferred away, leading to a drop in core body temperature. Hypothermia can impair cognitive and physical abilities, making it difficult to think clearly.
2. Cold water can induce a cold shock response, causing involuntary gasping and an increase in heart rate and blood pressure. This initial shock can lead to panic, which can further hinder survival efforts. Cold water also reduces dexterity and muscle strength.
3. Another danger of cold-water survival is the risk of drowning. The cold shock response can lead to rapid breathing and difficulties in controlling breathing, potentially resulting in water inhalation.
4. The remote and unpredictable nature of cold-water environments, such as oceans, lakes, or rivers, can further compound the danger. The distance to shore, limited visibility, strong currents, and challenging weather conditions can make rescue difficult or delayed, increasing the time spent in cold water and heightening the risk to survival.
5. Cold water survival situations can induce fear, panic, and disorientation, impairing decision-making and decreasing the chances of successful self-rescue.

STATS

- The U.S. Coast Guard reports that approximately 20% of cold-water drowning victims show signs of hypothermia. Hypothermia can occur even in relatively mild water

temperatures.

- Roughly 20% of those who fall into very cold water die in the first minute of immersion due to cold water shock. Without a Personal Flotation Device (PFD) and a dry suit, survival of more than 5 minutes is unlikely. Cold water shock is as extreme in 55F water as it is for 35F water. This means that for virtually every waterbody in New Hampshire and Maine, including the ocean, cold water shock is a threat from April through May, and can even be a risk in early summer for some areas. The death rate for boating accidents is 45% when the water temperature is < 50F but it is only 11% when the water temperature is 70 to 79F?
- Physical incapacitation is when you've become physically helpless in the water because you can no longer control your arms, legs, hands and feet. The impact occurs within 10 minutes in water under 70 degrees but can sometimes be felt within seconds of entering the water!
- According to the US Coast Guard, 75% of boat operators who died in 2021 had no formal boating education and were unprepared in case of an emergency.
- Over 30 percent of boating fatalities in Minnesota happen in cold water with a victim not wearing a life jacket.