Shallow Water Blackout Awareness Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. Shallow water blackout can cause sudden loss of consciousness while underwater. This can result in the person being unable to swim to the surface or take a breath, leading to drowning.
2. One of the significant dangers of shallow water blackout is the absence of warning signs or discomfort. People often do not experience the typical urge to breathe or distress signals that would typically prompt them to surface for air.
3. When a person holds their breath for an extended period, oxygen levels in the body decrease. Prolonged oxygen deprivation can lead to hypoxia, a condition where the brain and other vital organs do not receive enough oxygen. This can cause brain damage, memory loss, cognitive impairment, and other serious health issues.
4. Shallow water blackout is particularly risky during activities like freediving, underwater swimming, snorkeling, and breath-holding competitions. These activities involve prolonged breath-holding and can increase the likelihood of shallow water blackout occurring.
5. Many people may not be aware of the risks and dangers associated with shallow water blackout. Insufficient knowledge about proper breathing techniques, safety protocols, and the importance of having a buddy system during water activities can contribute to accidents and fatalities.

STATS

- There are no nationwide statistics on fatalities from shallow-water blackout. But in New York state alone, four people aged 17 to 22 and “known to be advanced to expert

swimmers” died in breath holding incidents, according to the New York City health department study.

- 3 deaths that were likely shallow water blackout were recorded in pools, which covers about half of the YMCAs in the U.S. All three had a military connection, including a Navy SEAL hopeful who died on New York’s Long Island, a veteran who was also a triathlete who died in Maine and a third case in the U.S. Southeast.
- As many as one of every 10 injuries to the cervical spinal cord is caused by a diving accident.
- The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) reports that an estimated 11,000 spinal cord injuries take place in the United States each year. About 80% of those injured are males. Diving is the fourth leading cause of spinal cord injury for men and fifth leading cause among women. The University of Alabama at Birmingham National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center says between 3 and 5 % of spinal cord injuries are caused by diving accidents.
- The American Institutes for Research reports that 57% of all aquatic-related accidents occur in lakes and rivers while only about 30% occur in swimming pools with the remaining 12% unknown.
- Neal Pollock, research director of the nonprofit health and safety organization Divers Alert Network recently told California’s Laguna Beach Independent that there have been an average of 44 breath-holding fatalities.