

## Drowning in the African Region: A Silent Plague

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[Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment](#) from immersion in liquid. Outcomes are classified as death, morbidity, and no morbidity. The African Region, known for its beautiful lakes, rivers, and coastline, is not exempt from this tragedy. To shed light on this silent epidemic, we will delve to understand the extent of the problem, its causes, and potential solutions.

### Drowning Situation in the African Region

The WHO African Region reported the second-highest drowning death rate, with a crude death rate (CDR) of 3.6 per 100,000 population. On a global and regional scale, these CDRs have declined since 2000, decreasing [from 5.1 to 3.6 per 100,000 in the African Region](#) by 2019. It was the third leading cause of accidental injury death in the African Region in 2019, accounting for **7% of unintentional injuries and 5% of all injury-related deaths**.

Drowning extremely affects children under the [age of 15 in the African Region](#). It is among the leading causes of death among children in this age group. Drowning rates vary significantly across the continent. Coastal regions and countries with numerous lakes and rivers often report higher drowning rates. [Seychelles is the country with the highest reported drowning death rate in the region accounting for 11.93 deaths](#), followed by Lesotho with 9.41 and Eswatini with 7.57 per 100 000 population. Countries with the lowest reported drowning rates are Algeria (1.05), Sao Tome and Principe (1.86), Gabon (1.92) and Congo Republic (1.93)

### Causes of Drowning

Understanding the causes of drowning is paramount for crafting effective prevention measures. [The World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) has identified several critical factors contributing to the alarming rates of drowning incidents in Africa. By shedding light on these factors, we can take significant steps toward safeguarding lives and enhancing water safety across the continent.

**Lack of Swimming Skills:** A significant portion of the African population, particularly in rural areas, lacks essential swimming skills. This deficiency in aquatic proficiency leaves individuals at an [increased risk of drowning](#) accidents.

**Inadequate Supervision:** Child safety near water bodies is a growing concern, as children are frequently left unsupervised in proximity to these environments, accelerating the risk of drowning incidents. The inadequate supervision of children, particularly in low-income households, underscores the need for targeted interventions to address this pressing issue.



**Boating Accidents:** In regions where fishing and transportation industries thrive, boating accidents constitute a substantial contributor to drowning fatalities.

**Floods and Natural Disasters:** The prevalence of seasonal floods in several African countries is a recurring concern, [resulting in numerous drowning incidents](#), community displacements, and

substantial loss of life.

**Alcohol and Substance Use:** The consumption of alcohol and other substances in proximity to water bodies elevates the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, ultimately contributing to a higher incidence of drowning incidents.

## Prevention and Solutions

Efforts to reduce drowning incidents in Africa should encompass a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, there's a critical need for widespread water safety education, particularly in regions lacking swimming skills. Community-based initiatives and public awareness campaigns can play a pivotal role in [promoting safe practices](#) and educating people about the dangers associated with water bodies.

Additionally, enhanced child supervision strategies, especially in low-income households, should be a priority to protect vulnerable young lives. In areas with active fishing and transportation industries, stricter enforcement of safety regulations for boating is essential.

Furthermore, addressing the impact of seasonal floods through improved early warning systems and [disaster preparedness can significantly mitigate drowning risks](#). Lastly, efforts to curb the consumption of alcohol and substances near water bodies should be supported through education and regulation to reduce the likelihood of risky behaviors leading to drowning incidents.

## WHO Response to Drowning

In November 2014, WHO introduced its inaugural [Global Report on Drowning](#), highlighting the long-neglected issue of drowning and urging governments and various sectors to prioritize prevention efforts. This report offered recommendations for tailored prevention programs, enhanced data collection, and the development of national water safety plans. It also stressed the need for collaboration among UN agencies, governments, NGOs, and academic institutions.

In May 2017, WHO issued "[Preventing Drowning: An Implementation Guide](#)" to assist practitioners in implementing drowning prevention strategies. Over time, drowning prevention has gained political attention, particularly regarding its impact on children and disadvantaged communities. UN General Assembly Resolution 75/273 (2021) established World Drowning Prevention Day on 25 July.

Furthermore, **World Health Assembly Resolution 76.18 (2023)** calls for Member States to develop multisectoral drowning prevention programs, focusing on community engagement and public awareness, backed by WHO and partner support. WHO is coordinating the first-ever global report on drowning prevention, per the World Health Assembly's request.

### **For more information**

[WHO factsheet on drowning](#)

[Regional Analytical Factsheet 2023](#)

[Global Report on Drowning](#)

[World Health Assembly resolution on drowning prevention](#)

