



WORLD CONFERENCE ON DROWNING PREVENTION 2011

VIETNAM
10-13 MAY

Building a global platform to reduce drowning

MEDIA RELEASE

CONFERENCE TO CURB CHILD DROWNING EPIDEMIC IN ASIA

FOR BACKGROUND

FRIDAY 6 MAY 2011: The World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 is set to make dramatic inroads into curbing the child drowning epidemic currently devastating Asia.

Research continues to show child drowning as the leading cause of death for children aged between one and four in many Asian countries. It is estimated that 300,000 children drown in Asia every year.

Ninety-six per cent of drowning occurs in low and middle income countries—mostly in Asia and Africa—and mostly through everyday activities in wells, irrigation channels, ponds and troughs, and not through recreation as is common in high income countries.

In high-income countries, public education campaigns and strong multi-sector collaboration, have led to the development of laws and regulations that protect the community from drowning risks. As a result, drowning rates, particularly those in children, have been reduced dramatically throughout the last century. However drowning remains as a leading cause of death in children aged 1–4 years in many high income countries including Australia, US and across Europe.

“Drowning disproportionately affects children, low income and less adaptive populations. Research and surveys continually show us that drowning has reached epidemic proportions in many Asian countries and is the leading killer of children post-infancy in many nations,” said Dr Steve Beerman, President of the International Life Saving Federation (ILS), which acts as the world authority for drowning prevention.

“We are aware that drowning may be an impediment for some low and middle income countries to achieve the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goal 4—the reduction of child mortality by 2015. Our aim is to ensure that every effort is being made to reduce child drowning in these countries,” Dr Beerman said.

Significant research undertaken by The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC), set to be released at the conference, will detail how specific community level programs have dramatically reduced the number of child drowning deaths within low and middle income countries.

The World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 is bringing together 400 leaders from fields including drowning research, prevention, rescue, lifesaving, disasters, and sport development to focus specific attention on drowning deaths in low and middle income countries.

The conference follows on from the World Water Safety Conference, held in Portugal in 2007, where the scale of child drowning in low and middle income countries resulted in an increased resolve and commitment to the issue by the ILS. It became increasingly clear that urgent focus on child drowning in low and middle income countries was required and that the next ILS conference should specifically address this issue.

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“We are not just interested in defining this problem. We are also keen to find practical, real world solutions that result in significant action,” said Pete Peterson, President of The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC), co-presenters of the conference and an organisation that, alongside the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia, has done extensive drowning prevention research in Bangladesh, Thailand and Vietnam in order to identify effective, scalable and sustainable drowning interventions.

“We are particularly excited about the evidence being presented from Bangladesh. It has taken five years of research, but we now know beyond a statistical doubt that it is possible to dramatically reduce child drowning as effectively and as cheaply as the other major child killers – diarrhoea, respiratory diseases and malaria. We now need to focus on scaling up these proven interventions to make a difference on a national scale and across the region,” he said.

Something as simple as swimming and water safety lessons is one such prevention strategy. Adapted from Royal Life Saving Society – Australia’s Swim and Survive program, SwimSafe teaches basic swimming skills to children in Vietnam, Bangladesh and Thailand. Teaching basic survival swimming and water safety skills is the single most successful way to prevent children over five from drowning. Research and evidence show that a child who masters the skills taught in the SwimSafe program has a significant reduction in the risk of drowning over the rest of his or her childhood.

For children under the age of five, however, there are different considerations. In low and middle income countries, birth rates are high, family sizes are large and very often children are responsible for supervising other children. As a result, most drowning occurs in early childhood, before the age of five.

Helping families develop more effective means to supervise young children, educating families about water hazards in and around their homes and providing safe places such as community crèches where mothers can leave children during their busiest hours are simple and effective ways of reducing child drowning among very young children.

These measures can be implemented in ways that are affordable and acceptable to rural communities as shown by the emerging evidence from these programs in Bangladesh where there has been a significant reduction in early child drowning.

The World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 is being held in Danang, Vietnam, a country central to the region and one where approximately 10 children drown every day.

The Government of Vietnam has welcomed the conference and is giving its full cooperation through its Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) and the Danang People’s Committee. The Government of Vietnam has taken a particularly proactive approach in recent times, with the formation of an interministerial panel for child drowning prevention, and the identification of 15 provinces with very high drowning rates.

“We all know, the issue of child death from drowning does not only take away the right to survival and children’s lives, affecting every family, but also creates a burden to the society,” said Mr Doan Mau Diep, Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA).

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“It is time for the whole society, all ministries and agencies to have a strong commitment and more decisive actions. Particularly, strengthening the cooperation of ministries at the central level, the leadership of local authorities on drowning prevention, protection and safety for children becomes more urgent than ever, in order to help our children live and grow up in a safe and healthy environment. “We express our gratitude to the International Life Saving Federation and the Australian Government for supporting drowning prevention in Vietnam,” he said.

The Australian Government is supporting the conference through its agency for international development, AusAID, and the Australian Embassy in Vietnam.

AusAID is encouraging of efforts to increase awareness and collaboration and to support prevention strategies such as the SwimSafe program in Danang and the recently formed International Drowning Research Centre – Bangladesh, which is focused on developing socially and culturally appropriate drowning prevention measures.

The 400 delegates from over 50 countries will attend the conference with the significant goal of building a global platform to reduce drowning.

“Drowning is a major global public health issue. We need to work together to prevent drowning in all nations of the world.” Dr Beerman said.

“Armed with the results of this conference we will have a global platform to reduce drowning with features including multi-sector collaboration, strong lead organisations, partnerships between researchers and policy makers, increased use of standards and regulation, and real action at community level. By empowering communities with evidence based interventions, many hundreds of thousands of lives will be saved from drowning and other injuries—now and in the future,” Dr Beerman said.

The conference has been organised by ILS members Royal Life Saving Society – Australia and The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC).

The World Conference on Drowning Prevention will run from 10–13 May 2011 in Danang Vietnam.

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World Conference on Drowning Prevention Partners

The International Life Saving Federation's World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 is being presented by the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia in collaboration with The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC) and other provincial, country, regional and international partners.

International Life Saving Federation (ILS)

ILS is a global, non-profit federation of over 100 national lifesaving organisations and leads the worldwide effort to reduce the global burden of drowning.

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia (RLSSA)

RLSSA has a proud history of lifesaving, water safety and drowning prevention in Australia. Established in 1894, Royal Life Saving has a strong commitment to reducing drowning through advocacy, education, training, research, health promotion, aquatic risk management and community and sport development. RLSSA also has an international commitment to drowning prevention in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC)

TASC was formed in 2002 to research and advocate child injury issues across Asia. TASC's research and capacity development activities in Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, China, Indonesia and Cambodia highlight the need for action to prevent drowning.

Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA)

The Vietnamese Government is proud to support the World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011 through the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA). MoLISA oversees the areas of employment, vocational training, labour, salary, social insurance, occupational safety, social protection, child protection, gender equality across the country of Vietnam. MoLISA holds the current chair of the Vietnamese Government's Child Drowning Prevention Panel and is active in working with key stakeholders to identify and address key drowning issues.

AusAID

The Australian Agency for International Development is proudly supporting the World Conference on Drowning Prevention 2011, as well as the SwimSafe survival swimming program in Danang and the International Drowning Research Centre – Bangladesh.

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