

Dry Drowning and Secondary Drowning

You Can Drown Out Of Water!

What is dry drowning? What is secondary drowning?

While “dry drowning” and “secondary drowning” are not official terms, dry drowning happens when someone breathes in small amounts of water during a struggle, which triggers the muscles in their airway to spasm and makes breathing difficult.

In secondary drowning, fluid builds up in the lungs, called pulmonary edema, after a near-drowning incident. The fluid causes trouble breathing.

A person who had a drowning close call can be out of the water and walking around normally before signs of dry drowning become apparent. But all dry drowning results in breathing trouble and brain injury, just as drowning in the water does. If untreated, it can be fatal.

What are the signs of dry or secondary drowning?

A person who has inhaled water can have:

- Trouble breathing, chest pain, or cough
- Sudden changes in behavior
- Extreme fatigue

These signs are not easy to spot, particularly in young children who may normally be fussy or tired after a long day in the sun and water. If your child struggles or has problems while in the water, look for these signs, which can appear hours later.

What should you do if you think someone is at risk?

If you notice any of the signs above, go to the emergency room immediately. Time is an important factor in treating dry drowning.

Can dry drowning and secondary drowning be prevented?

Water safety is the best prevention. Keep a close eye on inexperienced swimmers and children in the water, and teach swimmers to blow water out, know their limits, and not panic in the water.

There is no substitute for good parental supervision whenever children are around water, be it a swimming pool or a natural body of water. Drowning remains a serious problem, especially for children. Prevention includes knowing CPR, teaching young children to be water-safe or to swim, and putting a fence completely around a swimming pool to prevent young children from falling in accidentally.

Can dry or secondary drowning be treated?

Yes, both can be treated with oxygen or ventilation at the hospital.

How long after an incident is there a risk for dry drowning?

Dry drowning and secondary drowning usually happen between 1 hour and 24 hours after a struggle in the water.

Is dry drowning common?

Dry drowning and secondary drowning are not common. Together they both probably amount to only 1%-2% of all drowning incidents.



Information adapted from
www.webmd.com