

Stay safe around the River Thames

With the sunny weather during the school holidays, the public is being warned to stay safe around water. Youngsters are risking their lives by jumping in rivers.

The Environment Agency, which manages locks, weirs and many bridges along the non-tidal River Thames, wants people to be aware of the hidden dangers in the water.

Drowning can occur very quickly, even in shallow water, and the key to keeping safe is to take all necessary precautions to avoid getting into difficulty in the first place.

Experience shows it is often young people who get into trouble whilst swimming in open water, which can contain hazards, particularly in and around locks, weirs and bridges. Unexpectedly cold waters or strong currents can also catch bathers off-guard.

Top tips for river safety:

1. Don't jump or dive in, as the depth may vary and there can be unseen hazards.
2. Don't go in near weirs, locks, pipes and sluices. These and some other water features are often linked with strong currents.
3. Inland waters can be very cold, no matter how warm the weather. Those going into cold water can get cramp and experience breathing difficulties very quickly.
4. Keep a look out for boat traffic. Boaters, especially on larger vessels, can find it very hard to spot swimmers.

Parents and guardians can help keep children in their care safe by:

- teaching them to swim
- warning them not to go into water alone, or unsupervised
- ensuring they know where the children are and what they are doing
- supervising them closely when near any open water

Last year, the National Water Safety Forum reported 223 deaths from accidental drowning or natural causes in UK waters.

Russell Robson, River Thames operations manager for the Environment Agency, said:

One of the main risks is cold-water shock, causing you to breathe in water, weakening your muscles, and causing immediate heart problems.

Unseen currents and reeds beneath the surface could pull you under.

I'd urge parents and guardians to supervise younger children closely in and around water. Teenagers and young adults should be warned of the dangers and to remember some basic safety points when out having fun.

Read and act upon our water safety advice on GOV.UK – search 'stay safe around water.'

Anyone out in any kind of boat should wear a life jacket.

Swimmers should also bear in mind that rivers and other open water locations not designated as bathing waters, including the Thames, are managed for the purpose of protecting fish and wildlife, and the risks to human health from using them may be higher compared with designated bathing waters. For information on designated bathing waters in England visit www.gov.uk/quality-of-local-bathing-water.