

## **WHAT TO DO IN A BOATING EMERGENCY – COLD WATER SURVIVAL**

Newfoundland and Labrador's waters are colder than many of us think and can be especially dangerous if you fall into them unexpectedly. Prevention and being prepared is the best plan when it comes to boating safety on the water.

Wearing your lifejacket or personal flotation device (PFD) is your best chance for surviving in cold water and could save your life. If the worst does happen and you end up in cold water, it's vital to know the facts about cold water and what to do. Remember how to survive in cold water by understanding the facts and the "1-10-1" principle.

### **FACTS**

- The waters surrounding Newfoundland and Labrador are always cold, even in summer.
- Body loses heat 25-30 times faster in cold water than in air of the same temperature.
- Several factors determine your ability to survive a cold-water immersion, including your body type, physical condition, type of clothing worn, amount of in-water movement and your will to survive.
- Even expert swimmers lose the ability to swim after a few short minutes in cold water.
- Keeping your core body temperature warm is critical. Wearing several layers of wool or synthetic clothing will help slow heat loss even in cold water.
- Survival is possible if you prepare beforehand, most importantly by wearing your lifejacket or Personal Flotation Device (PFD).

### **1 – 10 – 1**

#### **1 Minute**

The initial cold shock of falling into cold water (less than 15°C) causes involuntary hyperventilation (gasp for air) for around 60 seconds.

Cold shock starts with a sharp, deep gasp of breath. Keeping your mouth and nose out of the water is critical since you won't be able to control the gasp and you don't want to breathe in any water. For about the next minute, your breathing will be fast and shallow. During this time focus on keeping your head above water, staying calm and slowing your breathing.

#### **10 Minutes**

You have around 10 minutes to get yourself out of the water. Fingers lose mobility fast so work immediately to get yourself on top of and securely tied to a floating object. This time is vital for self-rescue.

If the boat is nearby, try to get back into it. If that's not possible, try to hold on to the part of the boat that is as far out of the water as possible. This will help you conserve body heat and make it easier for rescuers to spot you. Remember that even for strong swimmers, swimming failure typically occurs within 1-2 minutes in cold water.

## 1 Hour

There is a critical risk of hypothermia within 30-60 minutes. If you can't self-rescue in the first 10 minutes, delaying hypothermia must be your top priority. The rate of body heat loss depends upon water temperature, the protective clothing worn, percentage of body fat and most importantly the way you conduct yourself in the water. Less movement equals less heat loss. If you're with others, huddle together to share warmth; huddle together closely - arms around waists and legs intertwined with children or the elderly in the middle. If alone, assume the Heat Escape Lessening Position (H.E.L.P.) by crossing arms tightly and drawing your knees up close to your chest to conserve as much heat as you can.

The more you delay hypothermia, the longer you have to call for help and the better your chances for survival.

### **Cold Water Survival: Be Prepared**

- **Always** wear a lifejacket or Personal Flotation Device (PFD). It will help you stay afloat until help arrives and can slow the loss of body heat.
- Carry signalling devices in your lifejacket or PFD, and signal for help as soon as possible.
- Stay with, or get back in your boat, if possible. Otherwise, climb onto any floating object and get as much of your body out of the water as you can.

STAY with the boat; STAY afloat; STAY dry; STAY still; STAY warm; STAY together; STAY sober...  
STAY alive.

You are in charge of your own chances for survival if you find yourself in cold water. Know the facts. Be prepared. You can survive!

Learn more about safe boating from the [Transport Canada Office of Boating Safety website](#).