



WORLD CONFERENCE ON DROWNING PREVENTION VIETNAM 10-13 MAY 2011

Building a global platform to reduce drowning

MEDIA RELEASE

STUDY SPELLS END TO ASIAN CHILD DROWNING EPIDEMIC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DANANG, WEDNESDAY: Key research released today at the International Life Saving Federation's World Conference on Drowning Prevention could dramatically reduce the child drowning epidemic in Asia if necessary interventions are scaled up.

Approximately 300,000 children drown in Asia every year with the research showing that these numbers could be reduced by as much as 80 per cent.

The specific findings come after four years of collaborative research between Royal Life Saving Society – Australia, The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC), the Centre for Injury Prevention Research Bangladesh and UNICEF.

"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.

Dr Michael Linnan, Technical Director for TASC: "Drowning kills more children than tuberculosis, more than HIV, more than malaria, and more than tetanus, whooping cough and polio put together," he said during his presentation, 'Child Drowning in Asia – From Evidence to Action' at the World Conference on Drowning Prevention in Danang, Vietnam today.

Dr Linnan revealed that drowning deaths climb dramatically from less than 20 per 100,000 for infants to well over 100 deaths per 100,000 for children aged 1–2 across Asia. Drowning still remains significantly high for children into their teenage years.

"If we want to make a difference, we really need to start interventions early in a child's life," he said.

Studies show children aged 1–4 are the most vulnerable to drowning, with a lack of adult supervision the main contributing factor. The Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB) along with partner organisations TASC and Royal Life Saving Society – Australia (RLSSA), developed a community creche programme (called Anchal) to provide children with a safe environment during the period of the day when the parents are busiest with household chores.

Research now shows that the Anchal programme had a fourfold reduction in child drowning rates, and a significant reduction in all injuries compared to children who did not attend Anchal.



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For older children, the SwimSafe programme has been teaching children aged 5–12 years swimming and water survival skills. The new research now shows a five-fold drowning mortality reduction in children who have graduated from the programme.

The challenge now is scaling up the interventions.

“Scaling up has to be part of the agenda, we can’t stay in pilot programs,” said Gordon Alexander, UNICEF Director of the Office of Research, speaking at the conference. “We need baselines, we need research and we need more money for research,” he said.

Eric Finkelstein from Duke NUS Graduate Medical School, Singapore conducted the cost-effectiveness of the study.

“This shows the highest risk-reduction from any study I have seen,” he said.

In addition, the preliminary figures, while still being finalised, indicate that the Anchal intervention can be implemented for as little as \$70 per child per year, and the onetime cost of a SwimSafe graduate is roughly \$18 per child per year.

Dr Linnan stressed the importance of this data that shows drowning in low and middle income countries can be reduced, and the cost effectiveness is relatively affordable. These results demonstrate an exciting opportunity to roll out the interventions on a regional 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) and runs from 10–13 May 2011.

For all media enquiries please contact:

Matthew Smeal – msmeal@rlssa.org.au

Mobile: + 61 434 483 493, International Mobile: +84 1258 128 308 (in Vietnam from 8 May 2011)

From within Vietnam: 01258 128 308

Justin Scarr – jscarr@rlssa.org.au

+ 61 408 434 011, Email: