

## So you think reservoirs are cool?

Every year people in Wales and the rest of the UK put themselves at risk of drowning when swimming in reservoirs. Most are teenagers.

### Why is it so dangerous?

The main risk is the cold. It may be a warm day, and the water may seem chilly on the surface, but just a few metres down it will be near freezing point.

### But what if I don't mind the cold?

An average adult person has only a 50/50 chance of surviving a 50 metre swim in very cold water (10C - 50F) or below. That's not much more than the width of a soccer pitch.

### Why is that?

Cold water can kill in three ways:

- Cold shock affects your breathing. It causes gasping and hyperventilation (very rapid breathing). It is involuntary – it affects everyone and there is nothing you can do to stop it. It can lead to panic and drowning.
- Cold makes arms and legs numb within several minutes. It means you can't feel or control them, so you will be unable to swim and may drown.
- Cold leads to hypothermia – a serious lowering of your body temperature. Even when you are out of the water and warming up it can cause heart failure.

All these things have happened to very fit and strong people.

### So at what temperatures is the water dangerous?

Not as cold as you may think! You will hyperventilate severely in water at 10C (50F), which is often warmer than summer reservoir temperatures at depth. This could make you unable to swim more than a few metres.

### So avoid the cold and I'll be OK?

No, reservoirs have other dangers. They are deep. So deep that they become so dark and murky that it's hard to see. And there is equipment just below the surface, that can operate suddenly and without warning to direct huge flows of water into works that treat the reservoir water for people to drink. And on top of that, how do you know there isn't sharp and dangerous debris below the surface?

### So what do I do?

Obey the warning signs at reservoirs. Don't take the chance of becoming another tragic statistic. It just isn't worth the risk. Remember, you can swim free at a swimming pool during the holidays. More information about Free Swimming is available from local leisure centres and the Free Swimming website:

[www.wales.gov.uk/freeswimming](http://www.wales.gov.uk/freeswimming)

