

Subject: Treatment – All Providers
Water Related Emergencies

I. PURPOSE

Provide standardized guidance for the recognition and management of water-related emergencies including drowning, near drowning, and SCUBA/diving injuries.

II. SCENE SAFETY

- A. Do not enter water unless trained and equipped to do so.
- B. Request specialized rescue resources early.
- C. Ensure rescuer flotation and PPE.
- D. Identify hazards: currents, waves, temperature, marine life.

III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

- A. Primary assessment: Airway, Breathing, Circulation.
- B. Prioritize oxygenation—hypoxia is primary cause of morbidity.
- C. Assess mental status and obtain vital signs.
- D. Evaluate for trauma, especially diving injuries.
- E. Treat hypothermia concurrently.

IV. DROWNING / NEAR DROWNING

A. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- 1. Early: coughing, anxiety, tachypnea, hypoxia.
- 2. Moderate: respiratory distress, altered mental status, cyanosis.
- 3. Severe: apnea, unconsciousness, cardiac arrest.
- 4. Associated: hypothermia, vomiting, delayed respiratory compromise.

B. BLS MANAGEMENT

- 1. Open airway and provide ventilations as needed.
- 2. High-flow oxygen via NRB.
- 3. CPR if pulseless.
- 4. Remove wet clothing, dry and warm patient.
- 5. Transport all patients.

C. ALS MANAGEMENT

- 1. Advanced airway if needed.
- 2. 100% oxygen with capnography.
- 3. IV/IO access and cardiac monitoring.
- 4. Treat dysrhythmias per protocol.
- 5. Fluids for hypotension.
- 6. Consider CPAP if alert with respiratory distress.

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V. SCUBA AND DIVING EMERGENCIES

A. DECOMPRESSION SICKNESS (DCS)

1. Signs: joint pain, dizziness, weakness, rash.
2. Management: 100% oxygen, IV fluids, supine positioning.
3. Transport to hyperbaric-capable facility.

B. ARTERIAL GAS EMBOLISM (AGE)

1. Signs: sudden neurologic deficits after ascent.
2. Management: high-flow oxygen, airway support, rapid transport.

C. BAROTRAUMA

1. Assess for pneumothorax, ear/sinus injury.
2. Provide oxygen and monitor.
3. Treat tension pneumothorax per protocol.

VI. TRANSPORT

- A. Transport to closest appropriate facility.
- B. Hyperbaric center for diving emergencies when feasible.
- C. Early hospital notification.

VII. DOCUMENTATION

- A. Submersion time, water conditions, temperature.
- B. Dive profile if applicable.
- C. Neurologic status and treatments provided.

VIII. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

- A. Delayed oxygenation.
- B. Failure to recognize diving illness.
- C. Incomplete documentation.