

Drowning Victim CPR Protocol – AHA Guidelines Summary

This document summarizes CPR guidance for drowning victims based on current American Heart Association (AHA) recommendations and lifeguard rescue principles.

Key Principle

Drowning cardiac arrest is primarily caused by lack of oxygen. Rescue breathing and oxygenation are critical.

Drowning Victim CPR Steps

1. Ensure scene safety before entering the water or attempting rescue.
2. Remove the victim from the water as quickly and safely as possible.
3. Check responsiveness and breathing.
4. Call EMS / activate emergency response and request an AED.
5. If the victim is not breathing normally, begin with 5 initial rescue breaths.
6. After rescue breaths, start CPR using a 30 compressions to 2 breaths ratio.
7. Compression rate: 100–120 compressions per minute.
8. Adult compression depth: 5–6 cm.
9. Children and infants: approximately one-third of chest depth.
10. Allow full chest recoil and minimize interruptions.
11. Use an AED as soon as available and follow prompts.
12. Continue CPR until advanced help arrives, the victim breathes normally, or you are physically unable to continue.

Important Notes for Lifeguards and Rescuers

- Rescue breaths are extremely important in drowning incidents.
- Hypoxia is usually the primary cause of cardiac arrest in drowning cases.
- Vomiting may occur during resuscitation — clear the airway quickly if necessary.
- Suspect spinal injury in diving accidents, surf injuries, or shallow-water impacts.
- If trained, provide oxygen and use a bag-valve-mask (BVM) when available.
- Monitor for hypothermia after rescue from cold water.

Child and Infant Drowning CPR

- Begin with 5 rescue breaths.
- Single rescuer CPR ratio: 30:2.
- Two-rescuer CPR ratio: 15:2.
- Infants: use 2-finger compressions for single rescuer CPR.
- Two-thumb encircling technique preferred for two rescuers.

Drowning Chain of Survival

- Prevent drowning
- Recognize distress early

- Provide flotation
- Remove from water
- Provide ventilation and CPR
- Advanced medical care and recovery

Reference

American Heart Association (AHA) CPR & ECC Guidelines

International Life Saving Federation (ILS)