

RNLI IS ON THE BALL WITH LATEST CAMPAIGN

Research by the RNLI has revealed that over one third of people in Ireland questioned said they would follow their instincts and fight against the water, if they unexpectedly fell into it. However the RNLI's 'Respect the Water' campaign is urging people to fight those instincts and not the water, and to remember that floating could save lives from drowning.

Sudden immersion in cold water puts people at severe risk of suffering cold water shock, which triggers the instinctive but life-threatening reaction to gasp uncontrollably and swim hard, which can quickly lead to drowning.

Research commissioned by the RNLI reveals that 39% of people in Ireland would follow this potentially life-threatening instinct if they fell into water, with 28% saying their immediate reaction would be to swim, while 3% said they would panic. Only 8% of respondents knew specifically to float (4%) or tread water (4%).

The RNLI has teamed up with the GAA for its latest 'Respect the Water' campaign, which is being supported through their 'healthy clubs' programme. The charity invited some of the GAA's top athletes and healthy club representatives to their

training college in Poole and to Portsmouth University to experience the effect of cold water on the body.

One of those who attended was Noel Browne, Castlehaven GAA's healthy club representative and well-known long distance open water swimmer (pictured here). He recently returned from swimming from the Gibraltar Straits, a major open water swim which he completed in five hours and 40 minutes.

"I train hard for my swims and spend hours in the water all year round. I've seen the effects of cold water shock on people who were not acclimatised to the water and it can be frightening and overwhelming," noted Browne at the launch of the campaign.

"Fighting against it increases the chances of water entering the lungs and puts a strain on your heart. The best course of action is to try to float or rest, just for a short time. The effects of cold water shock will pass within 60 to 90 seconds and let you regain control of your breathing, increasing your chances of survival."

He said that keeping calm will help maintain buoyancy, and "moving as little as possible until you have control of your breathing will give you a much better chance of surviving until you can swim to safety, call for help, or continue to float until help arrives".

NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Gareth Morrison, RNLI Lifesaving Manager noted that while the RNLI's volunteer lifeboat crews launch to hundreds of calls for help every year in Ireland, not everyone can be reached in time.

"Through our campaign, in partnership with the GAA, we want to start a national conversation about water safety. We're asking people to remember this lifesaving advice and share it with others – it could be the difference between life and death. Each year up to 28 people drown accidentally around the Irish coastline.

"The best way to stay safe is to choose a lifeguarded beach and swim between the flags. And if you see someone in danger in the water, call '999' and ask for the Coast Guard."

The summer campaign is shown in cinemas, outdoor events, radio, online, and on catch-up TV channels. For further information visit www.RNLI.org/RespectTheWater

