water safety
Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Drowning Prevention Strategy 2026

Annex 1: Northern Ireland Data Tables

Understanding the issue (data)

The following data are taken from the updated dataset used in the WAID Enhancement Project. This is v2 of the published 2019 to 2023 data and is the most up-to-date and accurate dataset.

Water-related fatality data snapshot

- Over the five years (2019 to 2023) 121 people lost their life due to a water-related fatality
- Accidental outcomes accounted for 45 per cent (54 people)
- On average, each year, there are 11 water-related accidental fatalities in Northern Ireland
- Eight in ten accidental water-related fatalities are male with accidental drownings most frequent in males aged 50 to 69
- Around half of accidental water-related fatalities happened at inland locations (49 per cent)
- 39 per cent of accidental water-related fatalities happened in the summer season
- The majority of fatalities (43 per cent) occurred during a recreational activity
- Alcohol/drugs were reported as being present in 22 per cent of fatalities.

Overall water-related fatalities

There were 121 water-related fatalities in Northern Ireland between 2019 and 2023. Accidental outcomes accounted for 45 per cent of these (n=54).

The average number of overall water-related fatalities was 24 per year, of which three fatalities were inconclusive outcomes, which may be later classified as suicide, crime or accidental.

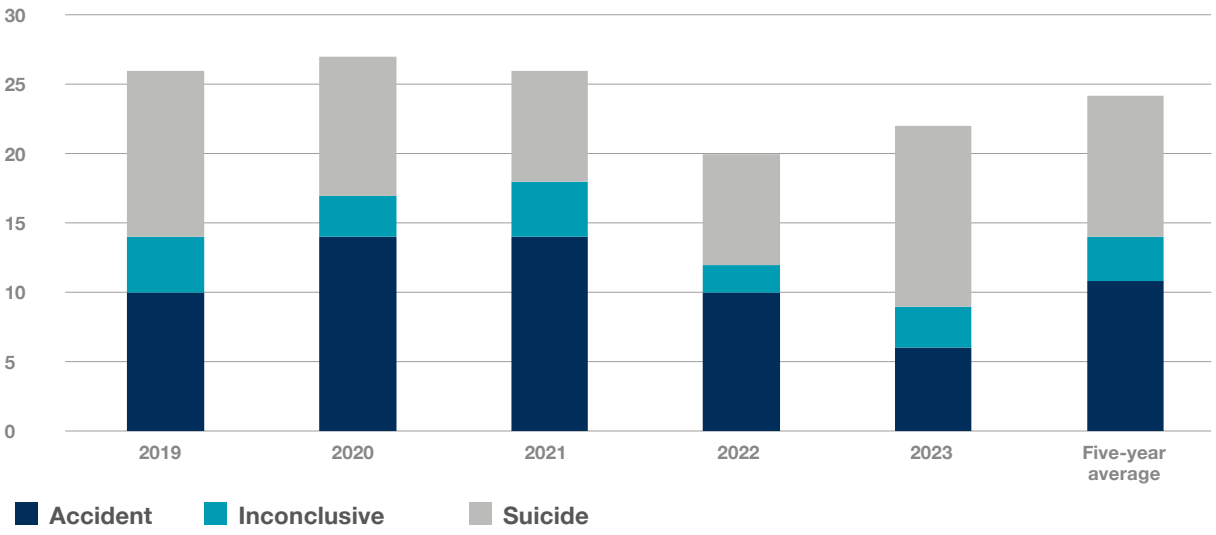


Figure 1: Overall water-related fatalities by outcome, year and five-year average

Accidental fatalities

There were 54 accidental water-related fatalities in Northern Ireland between 2019 and 2023. The average number of accidental water-related fatalities was 11 per year (see Figure 2).

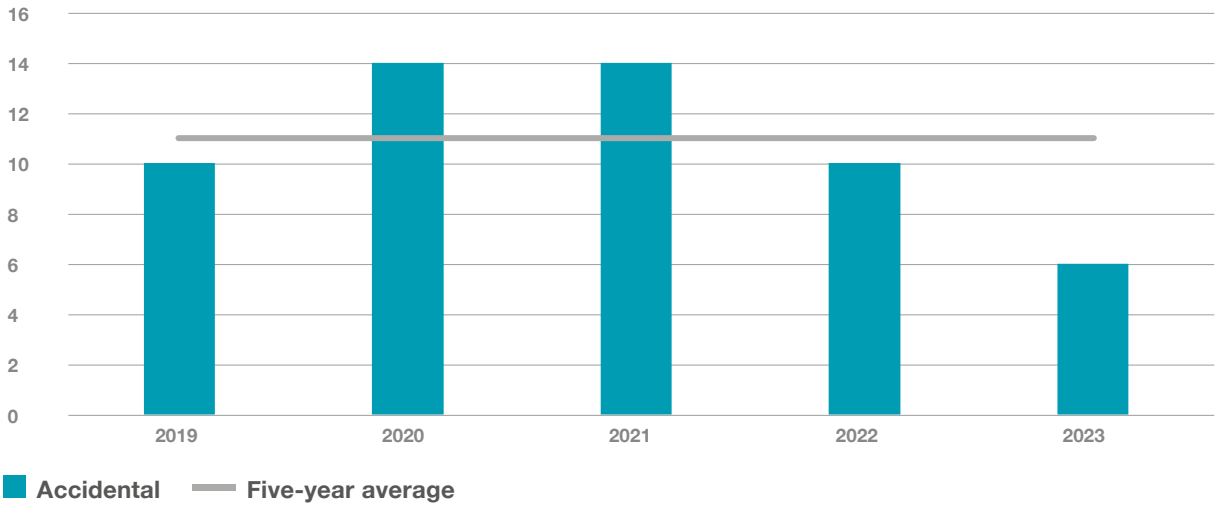


Figure 2: Northern Ireland water-related fatalities by year and five-year average

In terms of the rate per population, the average accidental water-related fatality rate per 100,000 people was 0.57 and has generally decreased since 2021 (see Figure 3).

Five-year average estimated population	1,906,906
Accidental fatalities	11
Overall rate per 100,000 people	0.57

Table 1: Accidental water-related fatality rate per 100,000 people

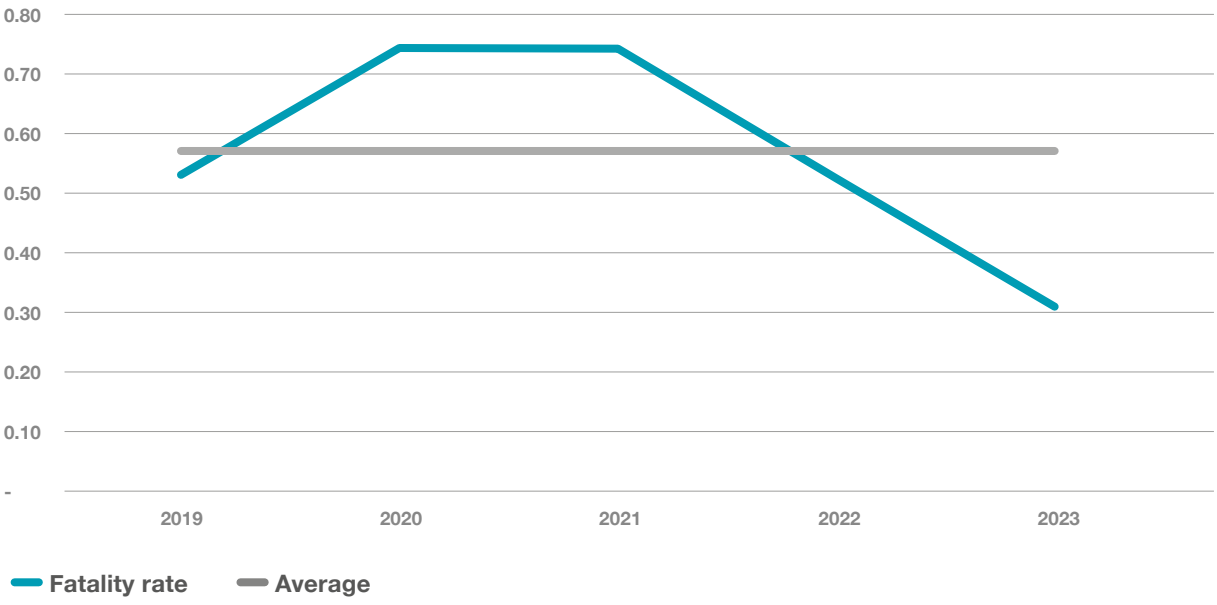


Figure 3: Accidental water-related fatality rate per 100,000 by year, Northern Ireland

Accidental water-related fatality data by demographics

Accidental drownings reflect normal everyday activities and happen throughout every stage of life. In every age group, however, males are the most at-risk group, accounting for around eight in ten of all accidental water-related fatality deaths (see Figure 4).

Accidental fatalities are spread across the age groups, with males aged 50 to 69 the most frequent group. Among females, those aged 50 to 59 are also the most frequent casualties.

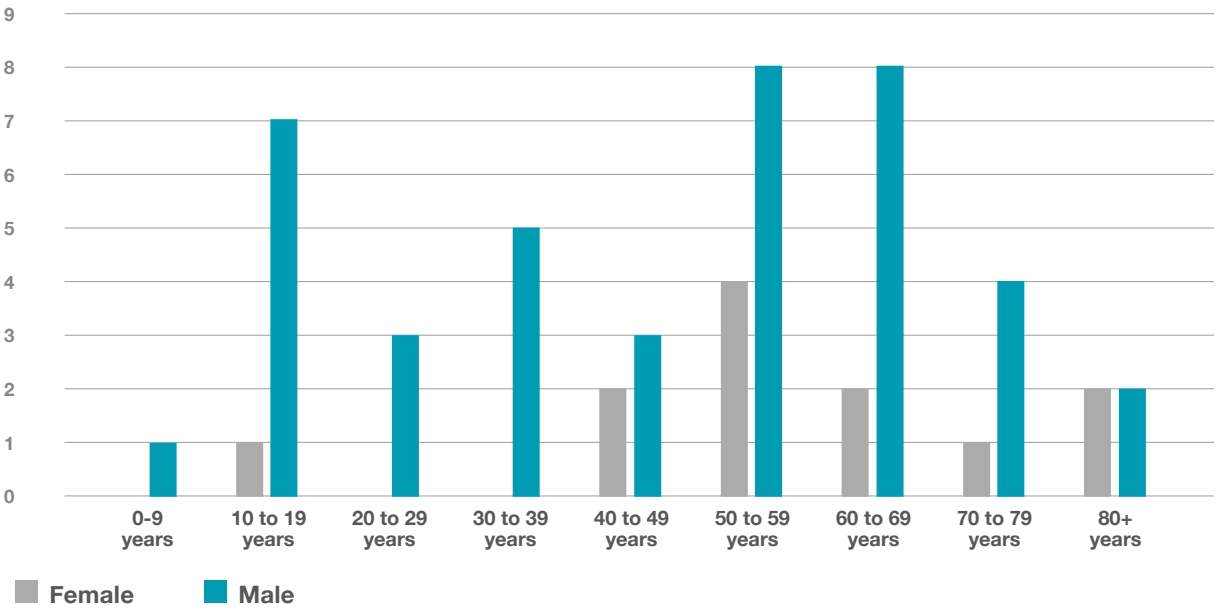


Figure 4: Accidental water-related fatalities by sex and age, five-year data (2019-2023), n=53 (1 excluded)

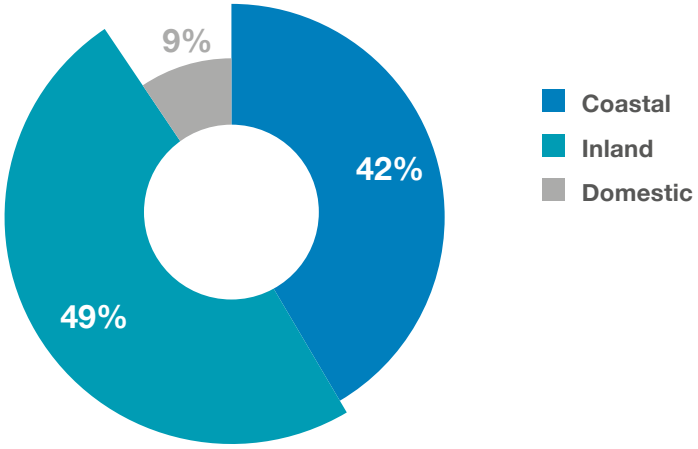
The average age of an accidental water-related fatality is 46.

- For males it is 42
- For females it is 59

Where do fatalities take place?

Over the five years (2019 to 2023), around half of accidental water-related fatalities happened at inland locations (n=26, 49 per cent) compared to coastal locations (n=22, 42 per cent) and domestic locations (n=5, 9 per cent) – see Figure 5.

Figure 5: Accidental water-related fatalities by location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=53 (1 excluded)



Inland locations

Inland locations refer to the following:

- River
- Lake/Loch/Lough
- Canal/Aqueduct
- Stream/Ditch/Burn
- Reservoir
- Pond (public realm)
- Dry ground
- Drain/Well/Pit/Culvert
- Quarry
- Marsh.

Of the 26 accidental water-related fatalities that occurred in inland locations over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), 12 were at rivers (46 per cent) – see Figure 6.

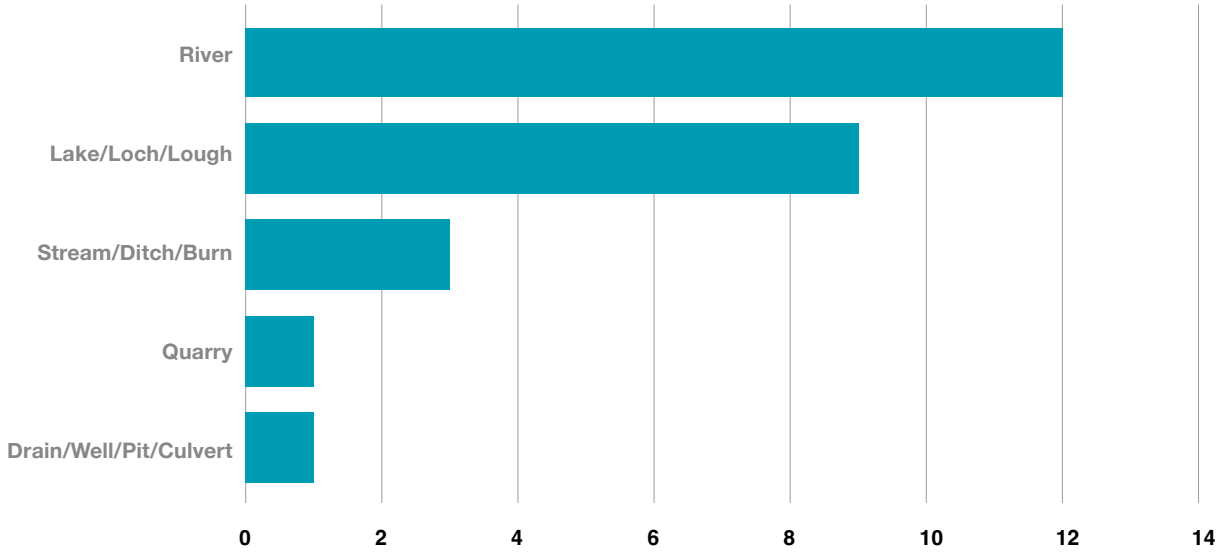


Figure 6: Accidental water-related fatalities at inland locations, five-year data (2019-2023), n=26

Coastal locations

Coastal locations refer to the following:

- Coast/Shore/Beach
- Harbour/Dock/Marina/Port
- At sea
- Estuary.

Of the 22 accidental water-related fatalities that occurred in coastal locations over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), 15 (68 per cent) were at the Coast/Shore/Beach – (see Figure 7).

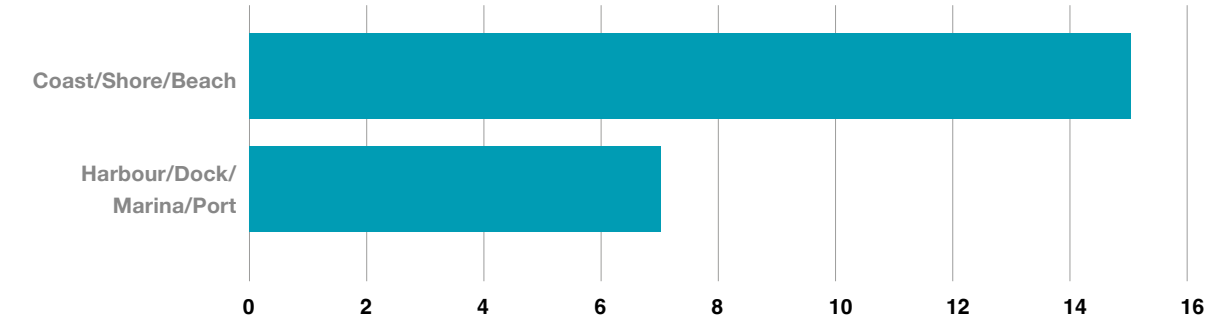


Figure 7: Accidental water-related fatalities at coastal locations, five-year data (2019-2023), n=22

Domestic locations

Domestic locations refer to the following:

- Bath
- Pond
- Hot tub
- Swimming pool
- Paddling pool
- Water container
- River
- Canal/Aqueduct
- Dry ground.

Of the five water-related fatalities that occurred in domestic locations over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), all five (100 per cent) were in baths.

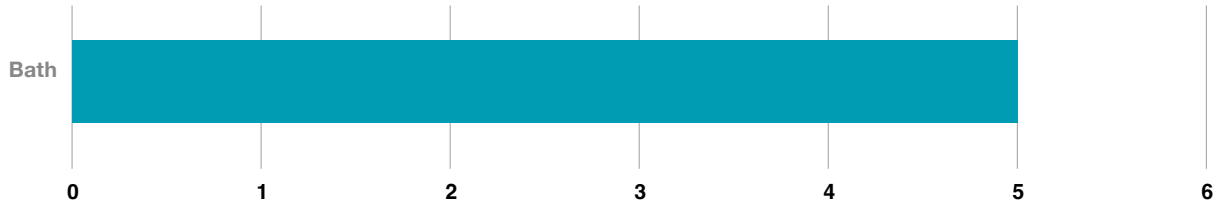


Figure 8: Accidental water-related fatalities at domestic locations, five-year data (2019-2023), n=5

When do accidental water-related fatalities take place?

Accidental water-related fatalities occur at every season of the year. However, fatalities tend to peak in the summer months (June, July, August), as can be seen in Figure 9, which shows 21 fatalities in the summer season (39 per cent).

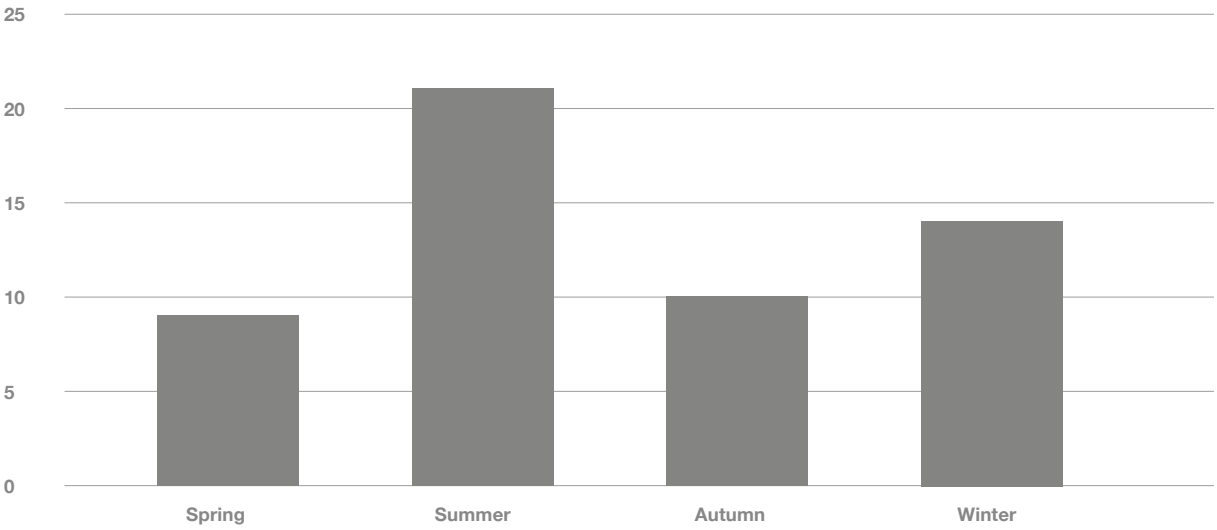


Figure 9: Accidental water-related fatalities by season, five-year data (2019-2023), n=54

By month, August recorded the highest proportion of accidental fatalities (n=10, 19 per cent) – see Figure 10.

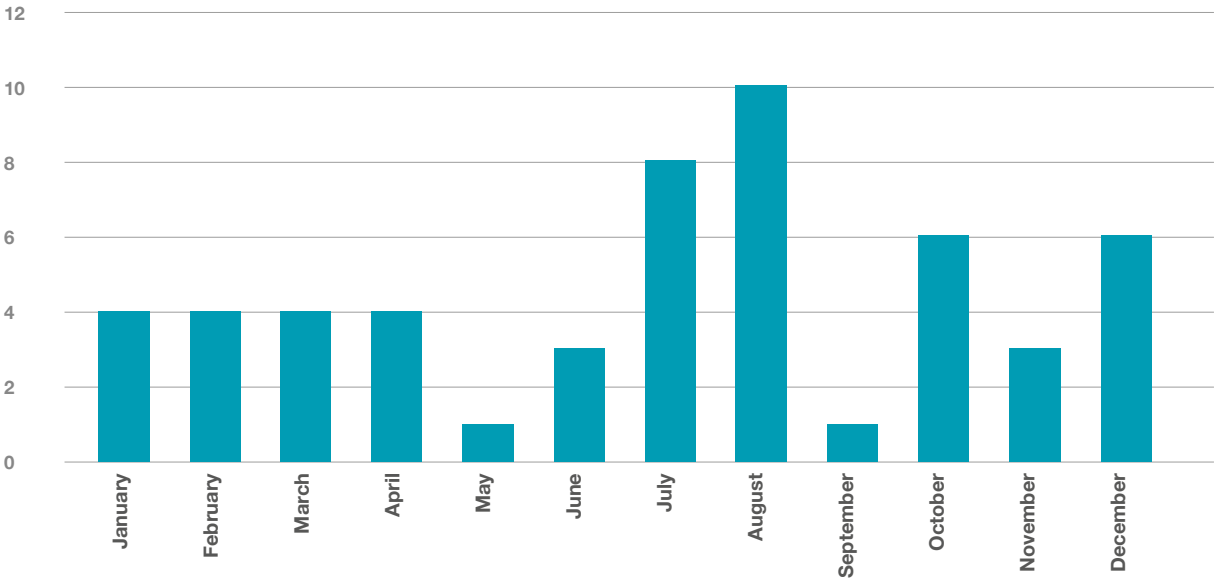


Figure 10: Accidental water-related fatalities by month, five-year data (2019-2023), n=54

When broken down by location, August recorded the highest number of reported accidental water-related fatalities for inland and coastal locations. December recorded the highest number of reported water-related accidental fatalities in domestic locations (see Figure 11).

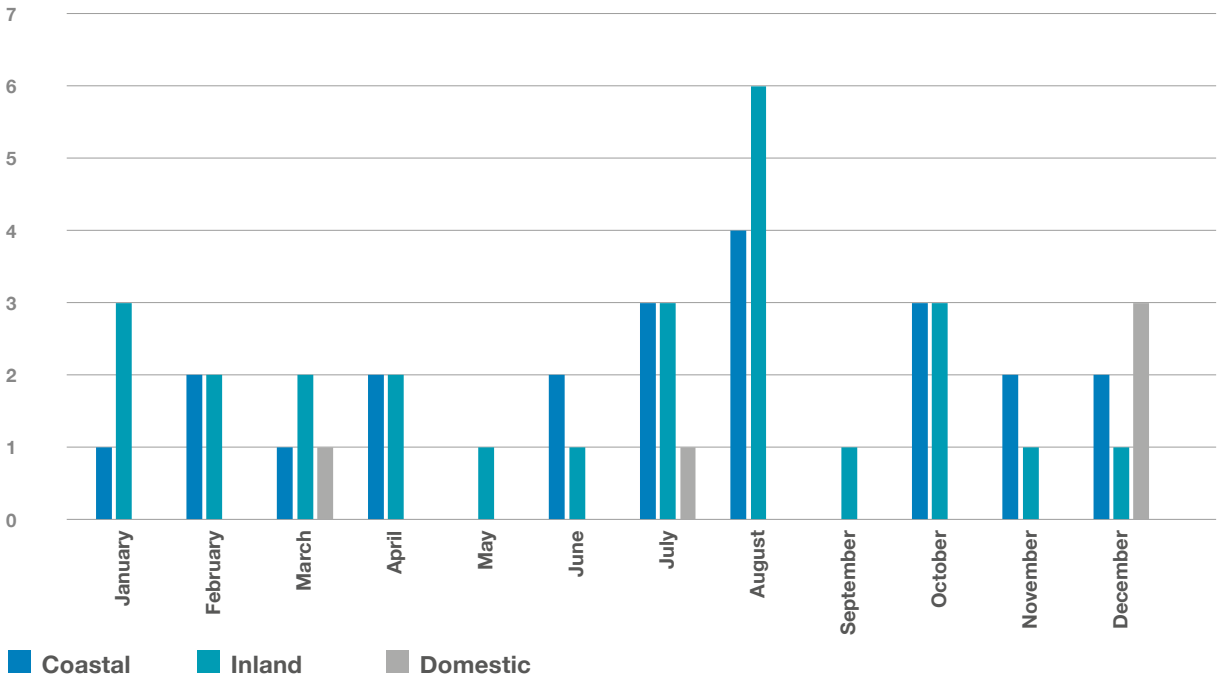


Figure 11: Accidental water-related fatalities by month and location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=53 (1 excluded)

Although accidental water-related fatalities happened across the full week, 18 (33 per cent) of them happened at the weekend (see Figure 12).

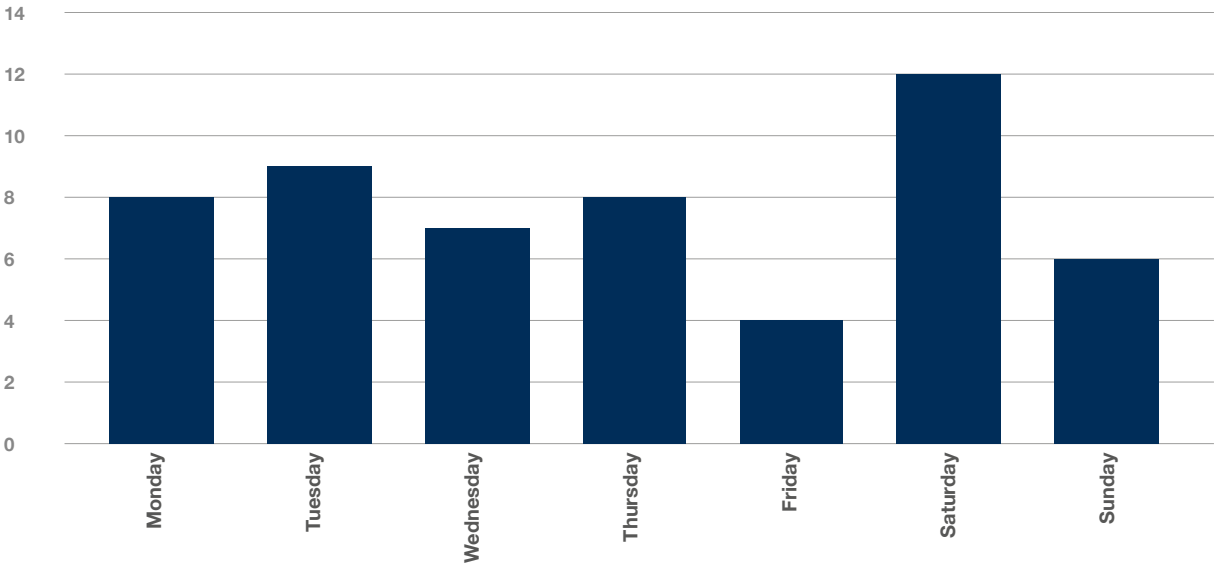


Figure 12: Accidental water-related fatalities by day of the week, n=54

Over the five-year period, when broken down by location, Saturdays at coastal locations reported the highest numbers of accidental water-related fatalities (see Figure 13).

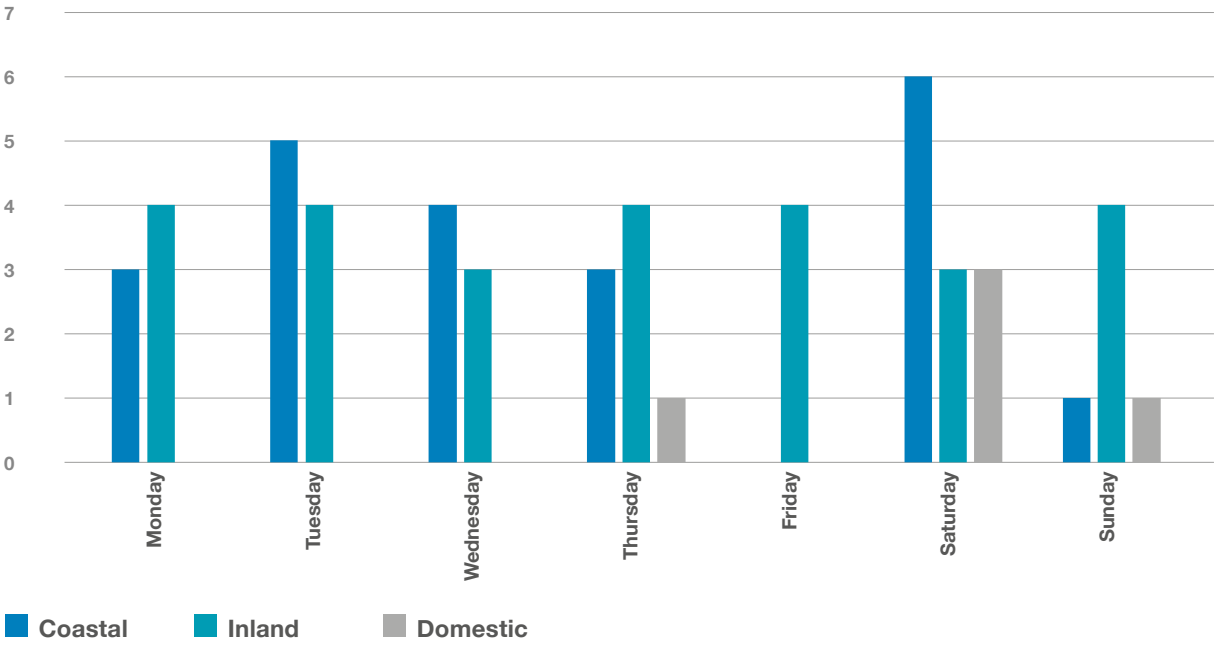


Figure 13: Accidental water-related fatalities by day of week and location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=53 (1 excluded)

What activities were people doing?

Accidental water-related fatalities occurred following a wide range of activities. The majority occurred following a recreational activity (n=23, 43 per cent), whilst 40 per cent (n=21) were doing everyday activities where they were not expecting to be in the water such as walking, running or cycling (see Figure 14).

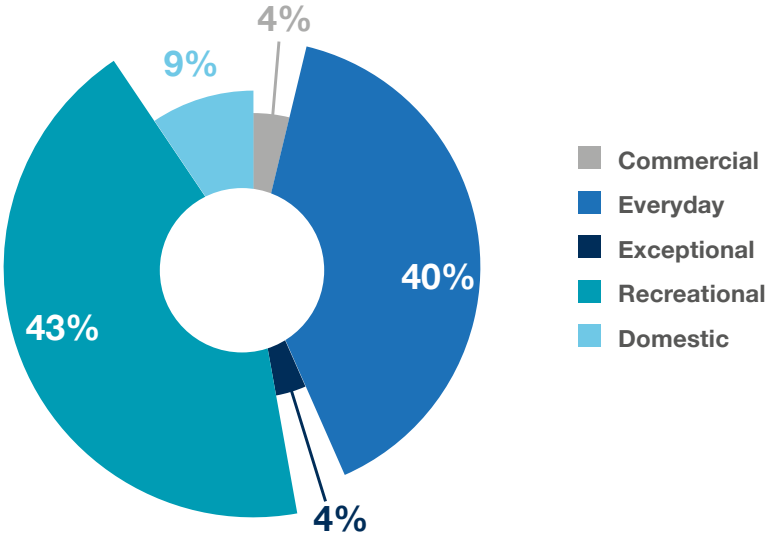


Figure 14: Accidental water-related fatalities by activity type, five-year data (2019-2023), n=53 (1 excluded)

Recreational activities

Of the 23 accidental water-related fatalities that occurred due to recreational activities over the five-year period (2019 to 2023), 12 (52 per cent) happened whilst participating in swimming (see Figure 15). When looking at the location of the five most frequent recreational activities, swimming at the coast accounted for the most fatalities (n=8).

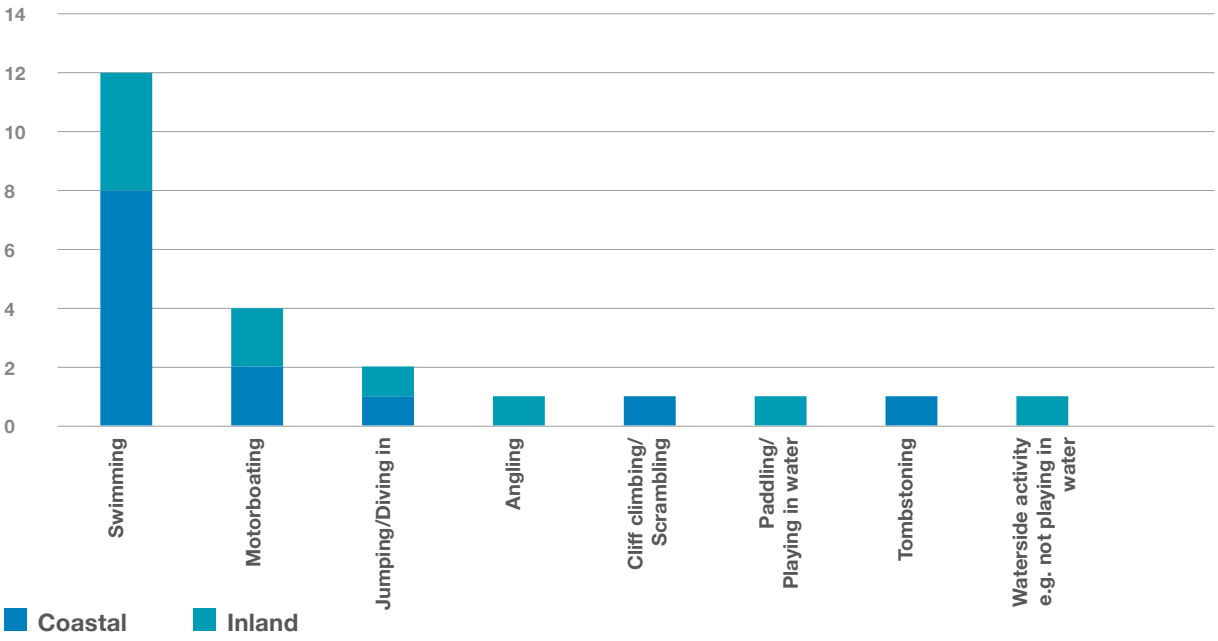


Figure 15: Accidental water-related fatalities by recreational activity type and location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=23

Everyday activities

Of the 21 accidental water-related fatalities that happened as a result of everyday activities, 18 (86 per cent) were the result of walking (see Figure 16).

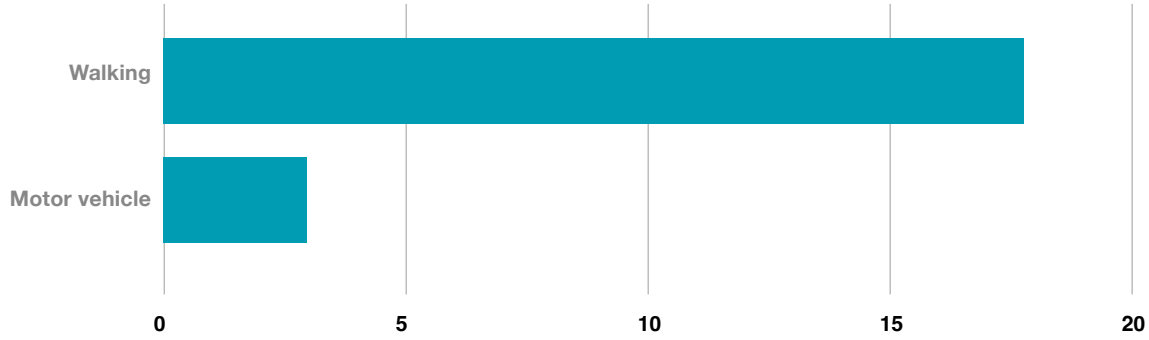
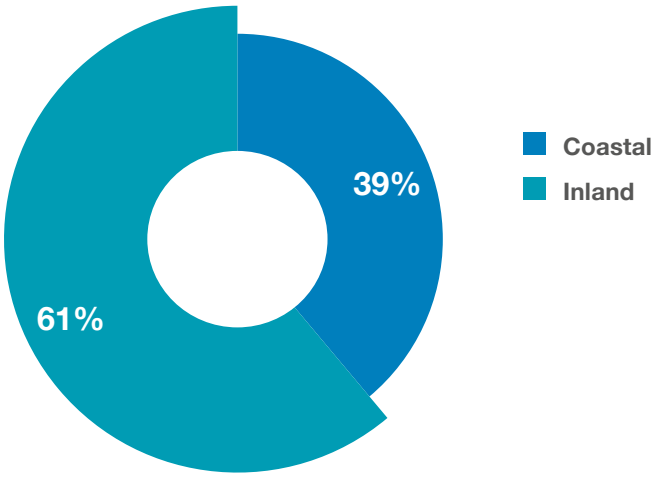


Figure 16: Accidental water-related fatalities by everyday activity type, five-year data (2019-2023), n=21

When looking at the location of everyday walking, inland locations accounted for 61 per cent (n=11) of accidental water-related fatalities (see Figure 18).

Figure 17: Accidental water-related fatalities by everyday walking and location, five-year data (2019-2023), n=18



The presence of alcohol/drugs

The presence of alcohol/drugs was reported in 12 (22 per cent) of accidental water-related fatalities. Figure 18 provides a year by year overview alongside the five-year average. Over the five years, there has been a downward trend in the number of fatalities that included alcohol/drugs.

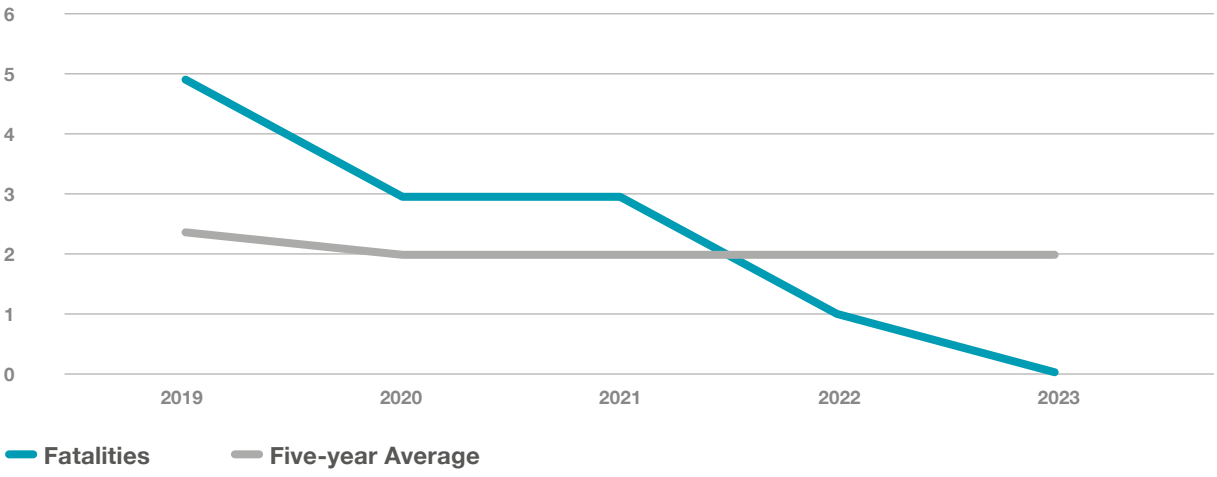


Figure 18: Presence of alcohol/drugs in accidental water-related fatalities by five-year data (2019-2023) and five-year average

Priority locations

Inland

As shown in Figure 6, 12 (46 per cent) of inland water-related fatalities over five-year period (2019 to 2023) happened at rivers.

When looking specifically at rivers, males account for the highest number of incidents, accounting for around eight in ten of accidental water-related fatality deaths (see Figure 19). Males aged 50 to 59 are the most frequent casualties.

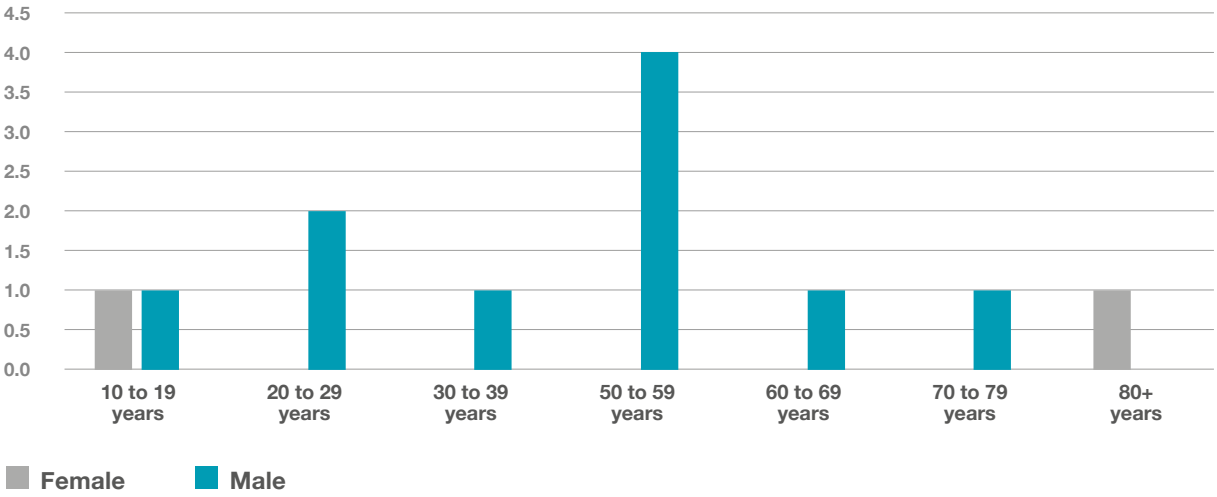


Figure 19: Accidental water-related fatalities by sex and age, five-year data (2019-2023), river, n=12

Accidental water-related fatalities at rivers occur equally across the seasons, as shown in Figure 20.

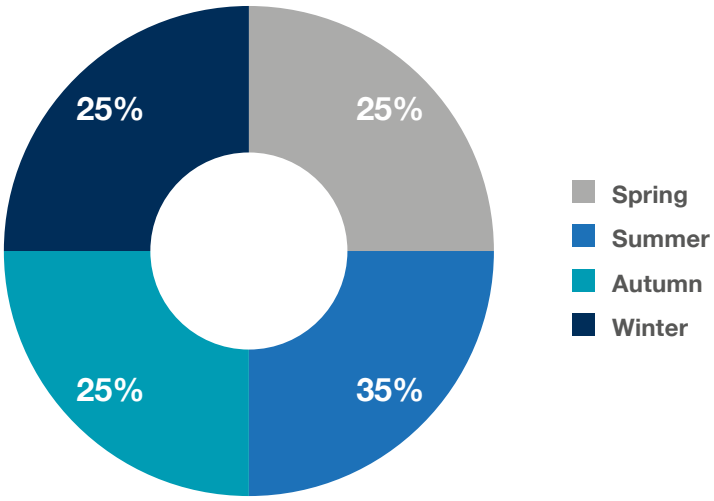


Figure 20: Accidental water-related fatalities by season, five-year data (2019-2023), river, n=12

In terms of activity at rivers, the majority occurred as a result of five activities, with walking accounting for most (n=6).

The presence of alcohol/drugs was reported in four (33 per cent) of accidental water-related fatalities at rivers.

Coastal

As shown in Figure 7, 15 (68 per cent) of coastal water-related fatalities over five-year period (2019 to 2023) were at the coast/shore/beach.

Males account for the most incidents, accounting for seven in ten of accidental water-related fatality deaths at the coast/shore/beach (see Figure 21). Males aged 60 to 69 are the most frequent casualties. Females aged 50 to 59, however, were also equally frequent.

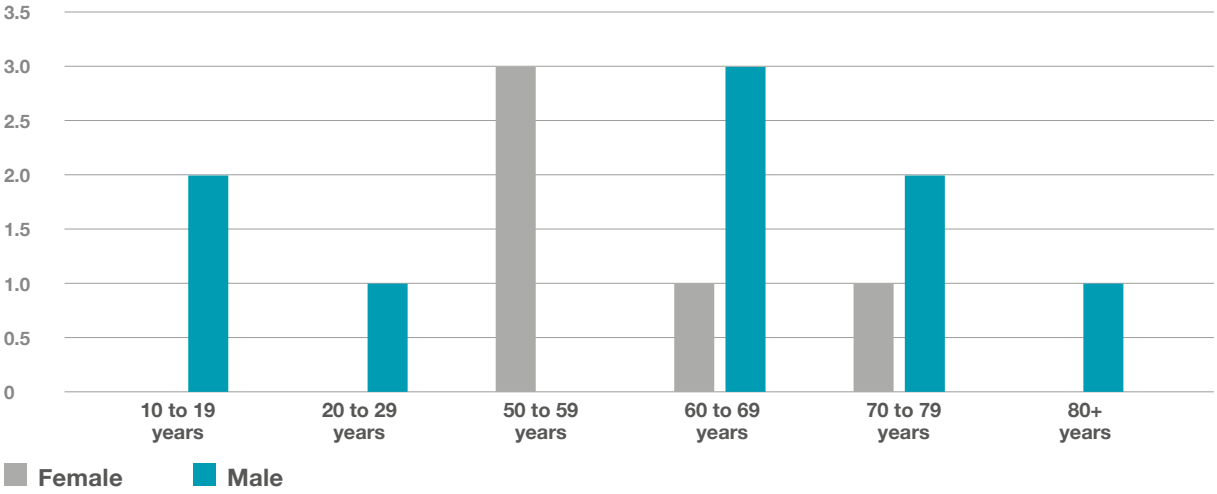
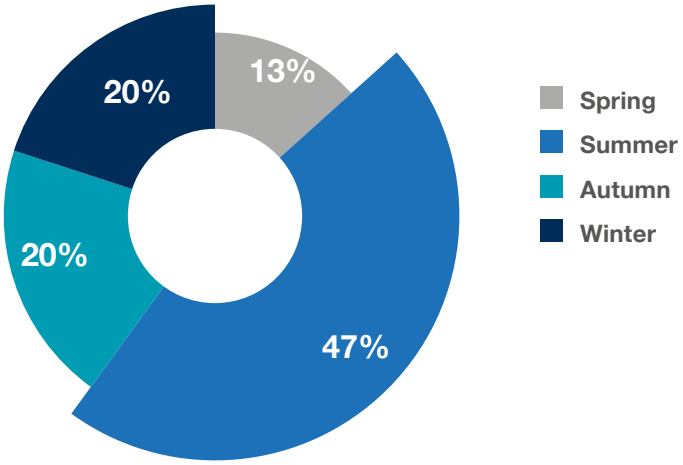


Figure 21: Accidental water-related fatalities by sex and age, five-year data (2019-2023), coast/shore/beach, n=14 (1 excluded)

Accidental water-related fatalities at the coast/shore/beach occur most frequently in the summer months (June, July, August), as can be seen in Figure 22, which shows 47 per cent fatalities occur during the summer.

Figure 22: Accidental water-related fatalities by activity, five-year data (2019-2023), coast/shore/beach, n=15



In terms of activity at the coast/shore/beach, the majority of accidental water-related fatalities occurred as a result of two activities, with swimming (outdoor) accounting for most (n=7) – see Figure 23.

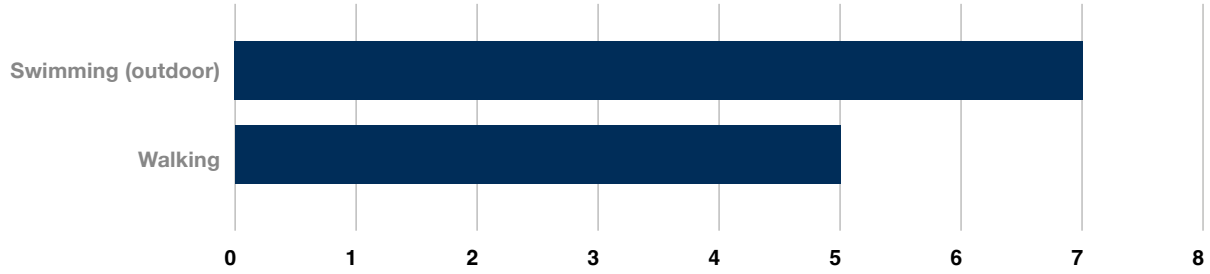


Figure 23: Accidental water-related fatalities by activity, five-year data (2019-2023), coast/shore/beach (n=12, 3 other activities)

The presence of alcohol/drugs was reported in four (27 per cent) of accidental water-related fatalities at the coast/shore/beach.

Notes on the data

All data used are from WAID 2019 to 2023 (v2) unless otherwise noted.

Population rate figures use ONS mid-year data from the Mid-2024 edition of the data.

Overall water-related fatalities include: accidental, suicide, crime and inconclusive.

Accidental fatalities refers to suspected/confirmed accidental causes and natural water-related causes. Suicide fatalities refers to suspected/confirmed suicide causes.

Inconclusive refers to incidents where intent has not been able to be categorised.

Where figures have been excluded due to limited information, this has been clearly indicated by category (e.g. n=394; 13 excluded).

WAID taxonomies for activity:

- Commercial activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded as commercial
- Domestic activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded in a domestic/residential setting
- Everyday activities where the deceased did not intend to be in the water (e.g. people who were walking, running and cycling next to water)
- Exceptional activities where the activity of the deceased was recorded as exceptional e.g. person/animal rescue
- Recreational activities where the activity was recorded as sports or a water-based activity.

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