LIFESAVING SOCIETY®
SOCIÉTÉ DE SAUVETAGE
The Lifeguarding Experts
Les experts en surveillance aquatique

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Information Bulletin
COVID-19 Resuscitation & First Aid Recommendations

Release Date - 15 May 2020

Background

When the process of drowning begins, the outcomes are often fatal. Unlike other injuries and many diseases, survival from drowning is determined almost exclusively at the scene of the incident and depends on two variable factors: how quickly the person is removed from the water, and how quickly effective resuscitation is performed.

In the COVID-19 era, lifeguards now face a decision about how to balance their own safety while providing life-saving care. There is much media attention on how dangerous the virus can be, however, several things must be considered:

- Individuals with moderate or severe infections are unlikely to be participating in water-related activities.
- Most individuals who become infected will experience only mild or no symptoms.
- Proper personal equipment, hand hygiene and screening at sites can help decrease the risk to rescuers.
- Rescuers should always assess the risk of providing care. This includes an assessment of their own health status – senior rescuers with other health problems are more likely to contract severe forms of the disease, and during times with high infection rates should consider doing other duties that does not involve direct public interaction.
- Employers have the duty to provide appropriate protective equipment so that rescuers can respond safely.

Since risk aversion is impossible, any attempt at first aid or resuscitation, may result in self-contamination. As there is no one-size-fits-all solutions to how we manage this new issue, this document will provide principles to ensure staff safety.

Implementation

Mitigating Risk of Infection When Administering CPR for a Drowning Victim

In consideration of rescuer safety, many lay-rescuer training organizations are recommending a shift in resuscitation procedures to using compression-only CPR.

As drowning is a hypoxic event, delay in ventilation increases the likelihood that the victim's condition will deteriorate or they may not survive. Drowning is considered a "special circumstance" where ventilations should be prioritized to positively affect victim outcome.

Due to the risk of transmission, mouth-to-mouth ventilations and in-water ventilations (with or without a mask) should not be performed (viral filters must remain dry to be effective).

Rescuers should put on gloves for all first aid interventions or at the latest, immediately after removing a victim from the water. It would be reasonable for rescuers to wear facemasks with eye protection when performing first aid if available.

During a resuscitation event, rescuers should minimize the number of people in direct contact with the victim.

To minimize exposure to the rescuer, the following are ventilation techniques in order of preference:

1. Bag-valve-mask (BVM) with a viral filter; two rescuers with one rescuer maintaining a tight seal during ventilations and compressions.
2. If no BVM is available, or insufficient training, rescuers may consider mouth-to-mask ventilations with a viral filter; two rescuers with one rescuer maintaining a tight seal during ventilations and compressions.
3. If only one rescuer is responding, a pocket mask with a viral filter and head strap may be tightly placed on the victim's face to create a seal.
4. If family members or close contacts are nearby and trained, it is reasonable to see if they would be willing to provide the ventilations – as there is an increased likelihood that they are already infected themselves.

Rescuers should properly discard all protective equipment after the rescue and wash their hands before continuing with their duties.

Mitigating Risk of Infection When Administering CPR for a Non-drowning Victim

If there is no history of drowning, it is reasonable for the rescuer to do compression-only CPR until the arrival of appropriate equipment (if not immediately available). During compression-only CPR, rescuers may use a protective covering over the victim's mouth and nose such as a towel or light clothing. When the equipment arrives, use the same precautions as for a drowning victim.

Lifeguards not on duty with no access to personal protective equipment should place a protective covering over the victim's mouth/nose and perform compression-only CPR.

Mitigating Risk of Infection When Administering First Aid

When administering first aid, apply the following principles to help reduce the risk of disease transmission. These principles do not replace first aid assessment and treatment skills, but rather provide supplemental considerations for use throughout the rescue process.

- Rescuers should put on gloves for all first aid interventions or at the latest, immediately after removing a victim from the water.
- It would be reasonable for rescuers to wear facemasks with eye protection when performing first aid if available.
- Maintain physical distancing (2 m) whenever possible.

- Rescuers should minimize the number of people in direct contact with the victim.
- Victims should be encouraged to wear a mask if tolerated.

Rescuers should properly discard all protective equipment after the rescue and wash their hands before continuing with their duties.

Definitions

- **Coronavirus:** Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.
- **COVID-19:** COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. As of January 2020 COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, affecting countries worldwide.

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Approval

- Approved by the Lifesaving Society Canada Safety Standards Commission on 29 April 2020.
- Approved by the Lifesaving Society Canada Management Team on 13 May 2020.
- Approved by the Lifesaving Society Canada Board of Directors on 15 May 2020.

Disclaimer

Lifesaving Society Canada's National Safety Standards are developed using Coroners' recommendations, the latest evidence-based research, and reflect the aquatics industry's best practices at the time the publication was approved.

In the rapidly changing COVID-19 era, Lifesaving Society Canada will update the COVID-19 Information Bulletins as evidence-based research becomes available. The information contained within this document does not replace or supersede local, provincial/territorial or federal health authority guidelines.