

ACFASP Instructor Information

Voluntary Hyperventilation Preceding Underwater Swimming



Questions to be addressed:

1. What are the most effective ways of communicating the danger of hyperventilation before underwater swimming?
2. Are the American Red Cross aquatic educational materials consistent in the message regarding hyperventilation and underwater swimming?
3. Are educational campaigns with lay audiences effective in changing behaviors related to hyperventilation before underwater swimming?

Recommendations

Standards:

Voluntary hyperventilation prior to underwater swimming and underwater breath holding is a dangerous activity. Swimmers should not engage in hyperventilation prior to either practice. Aquatic managers, lifeguards, and swim instructors should prohibit all persons from hyperventilating prior to underwater swimming and breath holding activities. **All aquatic facilities should have a policy of actively prohibiting hyperventilation.**

Instructional Implications:

1. * American Red Cross Aquatic Instructors need to emphasize the danger of hyperventilation before underwater swimming or underwater activities during any aquatic education courses.
2. * American Red Cross Lifeguards, Shallow Water Attendants, and Swimming Instructors should never allow anyone to hyperventilate before swimming underwater.
3. * American Red Cross Aquatic Instructors must not let participants hyperventilate or have breath-holding contests.
4. * American Red Cross aquatic course instructors need to limit participants to a single inhalation whenever they ask them to hold their breath and submerge.
5. * When setting up games that include underwater swimming American Red Cross aquatic course instructors need to set safety limits to ensure that participants can accomplish the skill in a safe manner
6. ** American Red Cross Lifeguard Management and Guardstart materials need to have more information and emphasis regarding the danger of hyperventilation before underwater swimming or underwater activities. Also, the prevention of inappropriate underwater swimming and/or underwater activities.

7. ** The American Red Cross Learn to Swim program, “Longfellow’s Whale Tales”, “Raffy Learns to Swim” Booklet and the “Waddles in the Deep” Booklet need to address the danger of hyperventilation before underwater swimming or underwater activities in an age appropriate manner.
8. * American Red Cross Lifeguards and Shallow Water Attendants training need to include prevention, recognition and response to inappropriate underwater activities.
9. * Dangers involving hyperventilation and underwater activities need to be addressed in all summer season warnings involving aquatic safety.
10. ** The American Red Cross “The Safety Training for Swim Coaches Supplement” needs to strongly address the dangers involving hyperventilation, underwater activities and hypoxic training.

*** Communication regarding these matters should be sent out via the appropriate manner to Red Cross aquatic instructors and professional rescuers as soon as possible.**

**** Future publications of these materials should reflect the recommended changes in this instructor advisory.**