

# Monterey County EMS System Policy



Policy Number: 4504  
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## **DROWNING AND NON-FATAL DROWNING**

### **I. PURPOSE**

To define the principles of care for drowning, non-fatal drowning, and diving emergencies.

### **II. POLICY**

- A. EMS personnel are to follow employer policy regarding water rescue.
- B. Routine use of a backboard is discouraged except as needed for extrication and patient movement. Spinal Motion Restriction should be considered for mechanism of injury such as diving into shallow water.

### **III. PROCEDURE**

- A. Ensure scene and rescuer safety. Call appropriate public safety agencies: fire, rescue, or police teams, including scuba teams to properly stabilize the scene and safely rescue the victim(s) from the source of submersion. Consider need for additional EMS unit(s) for rescuer rehabilitation and/or treatment.
- B. Maintain an open airway immediately upon obtaining access to the patient. Ensure spinal stabilization and immobilization if indicated (i.e., un-witnessed event, unconscious patient, or mechanism of injury). Assist ventilations as needed.
- C. Determine patient's hemodynamic stability and symptoms. Continually assess Level of Consciousness, ABCs and Vital Signs. Treat all life-threatening conditions as they become identified. Initiate CPR when appropriate.
- D. The following guidelines should be used by EMS providers to guide their decision about whether to perform CPR on drowning victims with prolonged submersion:
  - 1. Submersion less than 90 minutes in water less than 43 degrees Fahrenheit: Begin CPR and transport.
  - 2. Submersion greater than 90 minutes in water less than 43 degrees Fahrenheit: CPR may be withheld.
  - 3. Submersion less than 30 minutes in water greater than 43 degrees Fahrenheit: Begin CPR and transport.
  - 4. Submersion greater than 30 minutes in water greater than 43 degrees Fahrenheit: CPR may be withheld.
  - 5. If the submersion time is unknown and there are no obvious findings incompatible with life (e.g., advanced decomposition, separation of vital organs from the body), begin CPR and transport.

- 6. Initiate CPR for cardiac arrest for scuba diving emergencies unless time of arrest can be determined.
- E. If near-drowning incident involves a scuba diver, suggesting barotrauma, consider utilization of hyperbaric treatment facility.
- F. For viable patients and those receiving CPR, initiate transport as soon as possible.
- G. Encourage the patient to accept transport after a non-fatal drowning due to the potential for delayed respiratory problems.

**END OF POLICY**



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