

## Breath Holding / Shallow Water Blackout Policy

### Definition:

Shallow water blackout is the loss of consciousness of a swimmer caused by a lack of oxygen to the brain (cerebral hypoxia) following hyperventilation and breath holding. Without rapid rescue and first aid a fatal drowning will occur.

Shallow water blackout occurs when the urge to breathe is intentionally or unintentionally suppressed whilst oxygen levels in the body fall below the level required to maintain consciousness.

Unintentional hyperventilation may be caused by strenuous exercise, and the swimmer may experience no warning symptoms prior to blackout. Therefore the swimmer cannot be expected to recognise nearing the limit, nor to call for help or self-rescue.

Blackout due to cerebral hypoxia can also occur in deep water, therefore this guidance applies to all breath holding activities.

To reduce the likelihood of shallow water blackout occurring the following guidance should be applied to all FIN2FIT activities:

- Activities requiring breath holding (gaining their distance badge), no child should be under the water for longer than 10 seconds before taking a natural breath
- Prolonged breath holding activities (such as swimming under water) should not immediately follow strenuous exercise.
- Breathing should return to a normal/relaxed state before prolonged breath holding activities are repeated
- Lifeguards/NASTRAC should be informed when breath holding activities are taking place, and should intervene when activities are taking place without close supervision, or if hyperventilation is being used as a method to prolong breath holding
- Do not at any point encourage participants to compete with others to see who can hold their breath for the longest, or to see who can swim the furthest underwater
- Never allow any participant to swim alone (when no lifeguard or FIN2FIT Instructor is present)