



Notes/Definitions

- Hypoxia is the primary cause of injury in drowning; prioritize airway management and oxygenation.
- If drowning occurred after a dive, consider arterial gas embolism or decompression illness and treat per OCEMS Treatment Guideline E-010.

Base Hospital Contact for suspected spinal injury or trauma.

BLS Interventions

- Refer to OCEMS BLS Standing Orders B-001.
- Spinal motion restriction if diving or shore-break accident suspected.
- Prevent and treat hypothermia by removing wet clothing and initiating rewarming when appropriate.

ALS Interventions

- Cardiac monitoring.
- 12-lead ECG if applicable.
- Establish IV / IO access.
- Consider advanced airway management.
- Treat for respiratory distress, wheezing, or bronchospasms:
 - ▶ **Albuterol 6 mL (5 mg)** – continuous nebulization
- Conscious and continued respiratory distress after airway clearance:
 - Apply CPAP as tolerated per OCEMS PR-120; monitor closely due to risk of vomiting.
- Unconscious or unable to protect airway:
 - Advanced airway and confirm tube placement with EtCO2
- Treat for nausea and vomiting if not suspected or known to be pregnant:
 - ▶ **Ondansetron (Zofran) 8 mg ODT** - once
 - ▶ **Ondansetron (Zofran) 4 mg IV** – may repeat once after 3 minutes

Transport Consideration

- ALS escort to nearest appropriate ERC or as directed by the Base Hospital.

Additional Considerations

- Obtain submersion history if available:
 - Submersion time / downtime
 - Witnessed event
 - Resuscitation prior to arrival
- Aspiration and pulmonary edema may develop after rescue; monitor closely for worsening respiratory distress



ORANGE COUNTY EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

Prehospital Standing Orders / Treatment Guidelines

NON-FATAL DROWNING (Adult / Adolescent)

#: E-015

Page: 2 of 2

Original Date: 11/86

Revised: 06/09/26

Base Hospital

- If mechanism of history is unclear, err on the side of transport to a Trauma Center.

Cross References:

SO-B-001 BLS Standing Orders

SO-M-035 Respiratory Distress

SO-M-060 Nausea / Vomiting

E-010 Decompression Sickness / Air Embolism

SO-T-05 General Injury & Trauma

PR-030 Endotracheal Intubation (including ETCO₂)

PR-135 Supraglottic Airway Device Placement – Adult/Adolescent

Approved:

Review Date: 05/16, 02/17, 04/26

Release Date: 10/01/2026

Final Date for Implementation: 04/01/2027

OCEMS copyright © 2026