

Open Water Drowning Prevention Policy Strategy: Surveillance – Drowning Reporting Tool

BACKGROUND

- To safely enjoy water recreational activities, all children, teens and adults need access to swim lessons and water safety education.
- Research shows there is an 88% reduction in drowning risk for young children who take formal swim lessons¹.
- Due to variations in facility and funding availability, access to swim lessons and water safety education varies across the state. Offering swim lessons and/or water safety education as part of Washington State school programs or through parks and water recreation organizations like the YMCA is one strategy to prevent drowning among children and teens.

STRATEGIES/OBJECTIVES

- Increase access to swimming, especially among low-income and culturally diverse children, teens and adults.
- Promote swimming skill competency and water safety education requirements for all school-aged youth.
- Identify, implement and evaluate policies that promote learning to swim and open water survival skills among youth in Washington State.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

A. School Programs

To identify swimming skill competency and water safety education efforts taking place in public schools in Washington State and across the United States, Seattle Children's surveyed public schools and conducted an internet search for school swim and water safety policies.

The goal was to determine:

- The current swimming and water safety requirements, which can be models for policy change.
- How others define swimming competency.
- The levels of support schools need in order to require swimming and water safety.

¹ Brenner R, Taneja G, Haynie D, et al. Association between swimming lessons and drowning in childhood: a case-control study. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med 2009;163:203–10.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES CONTINUED – School Programs

Based on the assessment, school policy recommendations that would promote learning how to swim, swimming competency and water competency skills included a policy for in-water skill and education and a policy for out-of-water classroom-based water safety education. Key policy options also included forming partnerships between schools and community-based pools or other water recreation locations. The following are school program policy themes and recommendations based on learnings from the school policy assessment:

1. School Policy Recommendation For Schools with Pool Access on Campus:

- Offer age appropriate in-water swim classes as part of school curriculum. Swim classes could be offered as an elective class, included in physical education (P.E.) curriculum, or require all students to take swim lessons as part of the school curriculum.
- Include a swim assessment to assess swim ability which could include the following:
 - Swim 50 feet in the shallow end of the pool
 - Jump into the deep end, resurface and tread water for 1 minute
- Students who do not pass the swim assessment may be prohibited from the deep end.
- Establish and maintain a safe pool environment by:
 - Properly marked off deep and shallow ends
 - U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets available for use by all students
 - Trained and able swim instructors and lifeguards
 - Staff required to attend risk-management programming and appropriate follow-up training
 - 2 lifeguards and 1 instructor on-site while classes are being held
- In-class water and boating safety education that reinforces what is being learned in the water, addresses staying safe in open water (rivers, lakes, oceans, etc.), and distribution of supplemental information on water safety.

2. School Policy Recommendation for Schools without Pools on Campus but Have a Community Pool Nearby:

- Build partnerships with community pools/water recreation sites to provide options for students to learn and continue to develop swim skills at a local community pool near to the school or student's home.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES CONTINUED - School Programs

- Provide vouchers for students for free or low-cost swim lessons to local pools – collaborate on sharing the costs associated with accessing the pool(s), swim lessons and transportation to and from the school/home to the pools.
- Offer in-class water and boating safety education as part of school curriculum – seek out speakers from local pools, beaches, etc. to talk about water safety and drowning prevention and distribute supplemental water safety education materials to students

3. School Policy Recommendation for Schools with No Pool Access:

- Train teachers on water and boating safety curriculum and offer age appropriate in-class water and boating safety education to students that:
 - Emphasizes the importance of learning to swim and learning water competencies.
 - Provides students and parents with clear instructions on where to go to learn to swim.
 - Provides supplemental water and boating safety education materials to children and parents on importance of swimming and water safety
 - Discusses water safety in pools, as well as open water like lakes, rivers and oceans.
 - Assesses the information retained by students on water and boating safety (i.e. tests, projects, in-class discussions).

B. Everyone Swims Program

Seattle Children’s, in partnership with more than 30 pools, aquatic recreation organizations, community health clinics in Seattle and King County and other organizations, developed and implemented the *Everyone Swims* policy and system change initiative to increase access to swimming — especially among low-income and culturally diverse children and families. The *Everyone Swims* Toolkit, available at www.seattlechildrens.org/dp, contains information on how communities can roll out their own *Everyone Swims* program.

Community Needs Assessment Findings Related to Swim Programs

In 2011, Seattle Children’s and community partners conducted a Community Needs Assessment and shared results and recommendations with stakeholders and *Everyone Swims* partners. The assessment included 32 key informant interviews with partners and community stakeholders. The team also conducted five focus groups consisting of 51 participants, including African-American, Hispanic, Somali, Vietnamese and Caucasian parents and caregivers. Comments included:

“I could never afford swimming before, and it is a huge effort to get here. I had to make a huge life change.” – *Parent, Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic*

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES CONTINUED – Everyone Swims

“It’s probably the last thing we ever think of doing because the kids don’t know how to swim and it’s much easier to take them to a soccer game.” – *Spanish-speaking parent, Seattle Children’s*

“The doctor explained it to me – I can do swimming or walking. My main concern is privacy and (I) do not have a ride. But, it would be really nice to have (a) person who speaks my language at the pool teaching the swimming lessons.” – *Somali-speaking parent, Columbia Health Center*

The assessment revealed the following findings:

- **Screening:** Families view medical clinic staff as trusted sources of information.
- **Referral:** Families want assistance locating pools and water recreation organizations, and filling out registration forms. They also want an easier registration process.
- **Scholarships:** Families were unfamiliar with scholarship opportunities to participate in swim programs and want help filling out forms and determining whether they qualify. They also want an easier process to apply for scholarships.
- **Special Programs:** Families value special swim programs, such as single-gender swim programs and allowing more than one child for parent-child swim lessons.

Swim Program Recommendations

Based on the assessment results, community health and pool partners were encouraged to implement the following changes to their programs and policies:

1. Screening Recommendations: During medical clinic visits, include screening questions in the electronic medical record and on the well-child checkup paperwork that evaluate youth and families for swimming ability and addresses water safety, interest in swimming for physical activity and barriers to swimming.



- Recommend swim lessons at the well-child checkup for children ages 2 to 4.
- Conduct follow-up screening at the well-child checkup for children ages 5 and 6.
- Assess the child’s swimming ability, barriers to learning to swim and fears of parents/caregivers.
- Review medical charts to determine the percentage of patients screened and referred to community programs.

Pictured left: International Community Health Services flyer promoting low-cost or free swim lessons for children that were visible in their community health clinics. .

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES CONTINUED – Everyone Swims

2. Referral Recommendations

- Identify pools or water recreation organizations that provide rowing or other types of water based activity and develop a referral system from the community clinics.
- Host an “open house” event for families to become familiar with the pool and water recreation activities.
- Standardize a process for making swimming and water recreation handouts available in medical clinics.
- Assist families with filling out registration and scholarship application forms, especially the first time.

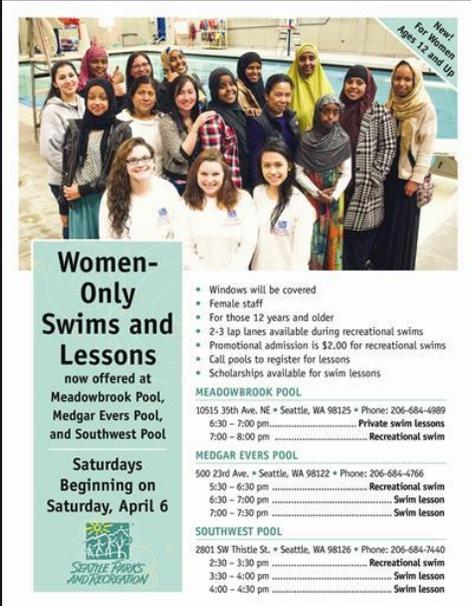
3. Scholarship Recommendations

- Provide scholarships for swimming lessons based on proof of participation in Medicaid, Head Start, the National School Lunch Program and other programs for low-income youth.
- Create online and paper scholarship application forms in multiple languages that are easy to understand. Collect information on race and ethnicity on the forms.

4. Special Program Recommendations Including Single-Gender Swim

- Offer gender-specific swim programs, swim programs for teenagers, and child-parent beginning swim lessons at pools.
- Clinics and water recreation organizations can partner to offer special swim programs to patients and families. For example, Odessa Brown Children’s Clinic currently partners with the Medgar Evers Pool in Seattle to offer swimming programs to patients who are overweight.

Pictured right: Single-gender swim flyer produced by Seattle Parks and Recreation to promote women-only swims and swim lessons.



Women-Only Swims and Lessons
now offered at Meadowbrook Pool, Medgar Evers Pool, and Southwest Pool

Saturdays Beginning on Saturday, April 6

- Windows will be covered
- Female staff
- For those 12 years and older
- 2-3 lap lanes available during recreational swims
- Promotional admission is \$2.00 for recreational swims
- Call pools to register for lessons
- Scholarships available for swim lessons

MEADOWBROOK POOL
10515 39th Ave. NE • Seattle, WA 98125 • Phone: 206-684-4989
6:30 - 7:00 pm Private swim lessons
7:00 - 8:00 pm Recreational swim

MEDGAR EVERS POOL
500 23rd Ave. • Seattle, WA 98122 • Phone: 206-684-4766
5:30 - 6:30 pm Recreational swim
6:30 - 7:00 pm Swim lesson
7:00 - 7:30 pm Swim lesson

SOUTHWEST POOL
2801 SW Thistle St. • Seattle, WA 98126 • Phone: 206-684-7440
2:30 - 3:30 pm Recreational swim
3:30 - 4:00 pm Swim lesson
4:00 - 4:30 pm Swim lesson

A Note on Single-Gender Swim Efforts: Community members from the Somali and Latino communities specifically identified mixed-gender swim environments as a barrier to swimming education. Mixed-gender swimming may not be socially or culturally appropriate. Providing single-gender swim programs may increase swimming skills and water safety among immigrant women and their children.

IMPACT

- Each pool and clinic participating in *Everyone Swims!* in Seattle and King County identified the policy and system changes they wanted to address. All pools and clinics made significant progress on increasing access to swimming and water recreation. This was measured by assessment of policy and system changes made and sustained and by numbers of attendees at water recreation and swimming programs.
- Single-gender swim programs now exist at public and private pools across King County and in three of four quadrants of Seattle, following a 2014 city policy allowing single-gender swim programs.²
- YMCA changed its policies to allow individuals who are not members to use pools for single-gender swim times.
- Pools, hospitals and community-based organizations collaborated to produce one single-gender swim brochure and all participating organizations made permanent changes to increase access to swimming lessons and swim times.
- Policy changes related to single-gender swim programs have been replicated in other cities in King County and have been included as part of national publications promoting partnerships between clinics and community organizations, and when promoting equity and social justice.

HEALTH EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

Everyone Swims was specifically designed to reach children and families of color and families who are low income living in Seattle and King County.

PARTNERS

- Community health clinics
- Community pools and beach programs
- Global to Local
- Neighborhood House
- Rowing programs
- YMCA

² Stempski S., Liu L., Grow M., Pomietto M., Chung C., Shumann A. and Bennett E. (2015). Everyone Swims: A community partnership and policy approach to address health disparities in drowning and obesity. *Health Education and Behavior*. 42(1S):106S-114S

DISSEMINATION

- **Presentations Included:**
 - 2011 World Conference on Drowning Prevention, Da Nang, Vietnam: “Everyone Swims: Changing policies to increase access to swimming lessons and water recreation.”
 - 2012 Washington State Public Health Conference, Wenatchee, WA: “Everyone Swims: Increasing access to swimming for culturally diverse communities.”
 - 2012 Children’s Hospital Association National Webinar: “Everyone Swims!”
 - 2012 Northwest Center for Public Health Practice Webinar: “Everyone Swims: Increasing access to swimming and water recreation.”
 - 2012 Washington Recreation Parks Association, Bellevue, WA: “Everyone Swims: Increasing access to swimming and water recreation.”
 - 2014 Leadership for Healthy Communities Webinar: “Everyone Swims.”
 - 2014 Society for Public Health Education’s 65th Annual Conference, Panel discussion, Baltimore, MD: “Everyone Swims!: Creating policy and system change through community partnerships to increase access to swimming and water recreation for low-income and diverse children and families.”

LESSONS LEARNED

- Partnership between community health clinics and water recreation facilities or between schools and water recreation facilities is an effective way to reach low-income and culturally diverse communities.
- System change such as developing referral systems between clinics and pools or schools and pools is an important consideration in improving access.
- For groups that cannot swim in mixed-gender pools, single-gender swim programs can increase swimming and water recreation opportunities.
- Increasing academic requirements and reduced funding for schools are barriers to requiring swimming through school-based programs. Therefore, partnering with city parks and recreation programs to facilitate pool access and working on a school district level may be more effective options.

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