



News Release

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Safe swimming and water sports keep spring and summer fun

Avoid tragedy by following simple safety rules

OLYMPIA — Our cool, wet spring brings with it unanticipated recreational water dangers.

While open water drowning is highest in the hotter summer months, spring rains and the start of fishing season increases the risks of drowning just by being around water.

Heavy spring rains have saturated the ground along rivers. Many riverbanks and lake shores can easily slough off into moving currents. Someone standing on the bank when it gives way can be thrown into the cold water unexpectedly.

“Some people think they don’t have to wear a life jacket if they’re on the riverbank or in a boat,” said Kathy Williams, an injury prevention specialist with the Washington State Department of Health. “In a boat, swimming in open water, or when working, fishing, or playing by the water, we don’t expect to get into trouble or to drown. Life jackets can help save lives so we can keep doing the things we enjoy in life.”

Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-death for children under age of 18. Most drowning deaths occur in outdoor settings such as lakes, rivers, and ponds.

Fishing and boating are major factors in drowning among middle-aged men. There are some simple things you can do to reduce the risk for you and your family. Life jackets are a must.

U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets are required for children less than 13 years old while on boats less than 19 feet long.

Here are some other tips for water safety:

— More —

- When possible, swim where lifeguards are present. Children who are in or near water must be supervised closely by a sober, attentive adult who knows how to rescue someone.
- Stay within designated swimming areas. Swimming beyond designated areas in lakes and rivers is a factor in the drowning deaths of Washington teenagers and adults. Be cautious of sudden drop-offs. Because rivers are constantly moving, they can carve new channels, bring trees down into the river and create new drop-offs.
- Many rivers and lakes remain cold all summer, even if they're warm on the surface. It's hard to swim in cold water, especially when one is tired. Hypothermia can set in quickly.
- Know your limits and your abilities; stop before you're too tired.
- Weather and water conditions can change quickly. Check weather forecasts and be prepared for adverse conditions.
- Set limits with your children — when they can go in the water, where they can go, who needs to be there, and what they should have with them. Just because they're with a group of friends does not mean that can rescue each other if someone gets into trouble.
- When swimming in the ocean, beware of rip currents. These are powerful, unseen currents in saltwater; undertows and tidal changes that can sweep people off their feet and out to sea. If you want to play in the surf, wear a life jacket; know the tide table, obey warnings, and let someone know where you'll be. If you're caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore until you're out of the current, then swim to shore.

[Drowning prevention tips](http://www.drowning-prevention.org/) (<http://www.drowning-prevention.org/>) and a coupon for a 25 percent discount on life jackets are available online.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for a healthy dose of information.