

Drowning Prevention

Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children ages 17 and under. Others at-risk are young adults ages 20-29, and men ages 44-64. About 80 percent of drownings in Washington State are in open waters such as rivers, lakes, ponds, and salt water. The National Safety Council says one drowning can cost up to \$3 million in total costs.

In Washington State from 2008 to 2012, 516 people drowned - about 103 each year. Most were between ages 20-29 or 45-64. There were 222 people hospitalized after nearly drowning. Most of these were ages 1-4. Drowning among children and youth ages 0-17 have declined greatly over the last several years. A non-fatal drowning can cause brain damage from lack of oxygen while under water. Some survivors have lifelong disabilities and need nursing care.

Key Messages to Help Reduce Risks

- ◆ Drowning is preventable.
- ◆ People are less likely to drown at pools or beaches where lifeguards are on duty.
- ◆ There are life jacket loan programs at over 150 open water beaches in Washington State. Locations are listed at the Seattle Children's website – see below.
- ◆ When boating, prepare for the unexpected. Boat smart – take mandatory boater education or kayak/canoe classes, have all safety gear, check the weather report, and all people onboard need to wear life jackets.
- ◆ Stay out of lakes and rivers in the spring, even on hot days. Lake beaches do not have lifeguards; and because of snow melt, rivers are colder, swifter, and more dangerous than in the summer.
- ◆ People need to know how to protect themselves from drowning while boating, swimming, wading, waterfowl hunting, fishing, and other kinds of water recreation – learn safety skills for any water recreation that you do.
- ◆ Parents and other adults are strong role models. Observational surveys show when adults wear life jackets in boats, children and teens are more likely to wear them, too.
- ◆ Know the water – Washington waters are cold enough to cause cold water shock and hypothermia even on summer days. Cold water shock happens very quickly, is disorienting, and weakens even strong swimmers.
- ◆ People have limits - know yours. Drowning often happens when a person gets tired while swimming, water skiing, or during other water recreation – best to pace yourself.
- ◆ Wear a life jacket when you boat, Jet Ski, water ski, fish, or during other water sports, and, when swimming anywhere without lifeguards.
- ◆ By law, children under 13 years of age must wear a correctly-fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket on all vessels 19 feet or under.
- ◆ Avoid alcohol when swimming, boating, or during other water recreation. The boating under the influence (BUI) law has more fines and penalties now than in the past.

- ◆ Keep children within arms' reach when near any type of water. Give them "active supervision" – always watching and not distracted by reading, talking on the phone, talking with others, napping, or using alcohol or other drugs.
- ◆ Know where rescue equipment is and how to use it. Have a cell phone with you, and be able to give your location/address to 911.

Information and Resources

- ◆ American Canoe Association www.americancanoe.org
- ◆ National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) www.nasbla.org
- ◆ National Safe Boating Council www.safeboatingcouncil.org
- ◆ Safe Kids Washington www.safekidswashington.org
- ◆ Safe Kids Worldwide www.safekids.org
- ◆ Seattle Children's Hospital drowning prevention website <http://www.seattlechildrens.org/dp>
- ◆ United State Coast Guard: www.uscgboating.org/
- ◆ WA State Injury and Violence Prevention Guide, 2013 [Drowning \(PDF\)](#)
- ◆ WA State Parks Boating Safety Program www.boat.wa.gov
- ◆ WA State Water Recreation Program www.doh.wa.gov/communityandEnvironment

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