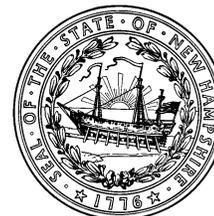


NH Department of Health and Human Services  
129 Pleasant Street – Hugh Gallen State Office Park  
Concord, NH 03301



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**CONTACT**  
**Public Information Office**  
**603-271-9388**  
**Twitter: NHDHHSPIO**  
**Facebook: NHDepartmentOfHealthAndHumanServices**

## **Enjoy the Water and Stay Healthy**

*DHHS Recognizes Recreational Water Illness and Injury Prevention Week*

**Concord, NH** – May 21-27 is Recreational Water Illness and Injury (RWII) Prevention Week. The goal of this observance is to raise awareness about healthy and safe swimming behaviors, including ways to prevent recreational water illnesses and injuries. This year the campaign is focusing on drowning prevention and the importance of swimmer education. The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Public Health Services is encouraging everyone to enjoy all the Granite State has to offer but to do so safely.

Recreational water illnesses are caused by germs spread by swallowing, breathing in mists or aerosols of, or having contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, hot tubs, water parks, water play areas, interactive fountains, lakes, rivers, or oceans. Recreational water illnesses can also be caused by chemicals in the water or chemicals that evaporate from the water and cause indoor air quality problems. Recreational water injuries can be caused by tripping, falling, and of course drowning.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2007 there were 3,443 fatal, unintentional drownings (non-boating related) in the United States, averaging ten deaths per day. An additional 496 people died from drowning in boating-related incidents. In the past ten years, there have been, on average, 11 drowning deaths per year in New Hampshire. Most of the deaths occur in natural bodies of water, such as lakes and rivers, not in swimming pools.

“Any accidental death is heart-breaking,” said Dr. José Montero, Director of Public Health at DHHS, “but they are especially sad when a child is involved. Children love playing in the water and it is a great form of exercise and entertainment, but we need to use abundant caution to make sure no one gets hurt. New Hampshire has much to offer in the summer especially its lakes, rivers, and ocean, so we want to encourage people to get outdoors and enjoy, but to do so safely.”

Certain factors influence drowning risk:

- **Lack of Supervision and Barriers.** Supervision by a lifeguard or designated water-watcher is the most important way to protect young children when they are in the water, whether a pool or bathtub. But when children are not supposed to be in the water, supervision alone isn't enough to keep them safe.

- Barriers such as pool fencing should be used to help prevent young children from gaining access to the pool area without caregivers' awareness. There is an 83% reduction in the risk of childhood drowning with a four-sided isolation pool fence, compared with three-sided property-line fencing.
- Among children ages 1 to 4 years, most drownings occur in residential swimming pools. Most young children who drowned in pools were last seen in the home, had been out of sight less than five minutes, and were in the care of one or both parents at the time.
- **Lack of Life Jacket Use in Recreational Boating.** Among those who drowned across the United States, 9 out of 10 were not wearing a life jacket. In New Hampshire, it is a law that children 12 and younger wear a life jacket when on a boat. Most boating fatalities that occurred during 2008 (72%) were caused by drowning, with 90% of victims not wearing life jackets; the remainder were due to trauma, hypothermia, carbon monoxide poisoning, or other causes. Hypothermia is particularly important to be aware of in New Hampshire, especially in the spring and early summer, because of our colder natural bodies of water.
- **Alcohol Use.** Alcohol use is involved in up to half of adolescent and adult deaths associated with water recreation and about one in five reported boating fatalities. Alcohol influences balance, coordination, and judgment, and its effects are heightened by sun exposure and heat.
- **Seizure Disorders.** For persons with seizure disorders, drowning is the most common cause of unintentional injury death, with the bathtub as the site of highest drowning risk.

Safe Kids New Hampshire serves as a hub for communication and collaboration for people and organizations in the State who are interested in preventing unintentional childhood injuries, including those in the water. Safe Kids New Hampshire provides educational materials to the public as well as barriers to preventing drowning. For example, there is a lifejacket loaner station on the Merrimack River in Concord. "The station provides lifejackets free of charge for boaters on the Merrimack who may have forgotten or do not own one," says Jim Esdon, Program Manager at the Injury Prevention Center at Dartmouth, the facilitator of Safe Kids New Hampshire. For information about Safe Kids New Hampshire, visit [http://chad.dartmouth-hitchcock.org/injury\\_prevention/injury\\_center\\_programs\\_childhood\\_safekids.html](http://chad.dartmouth-hitchcock.org/injury_prevention/injury_center_programs_childhood_safekids.html).

For more information about recreational water illness prevention, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/rwi-prevent.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/rwi-prevent.html). For more information about drowning prevention, visit [www.cdc.gov/SafeChild/Drowning/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/SafeChild/Drowning/index.html). For more information about healthy swimming, visit [www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming).

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