



**State of Minnesota
The Office of Ombudsman for
Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities**



Water Safety Alert



This Medical Alert is based on the work of the Medical Review Subcommittee and should be posted prominently. The Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities works to improve the services provided to people with disabilities by communicating important information found in the Medical Review Subcommittee's reviews of deaths and serious injuries. Thank you for promptly reporting deaths and serious injuries. You are helping us to meet our mission.

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, there were 40 “non-boating” drownings (down from 50 in 2011), 15 boating fatalities (down from 16 in 2011), and 72 non-fatal boating accidents (up from 67 in 2011) in Minnesota in 2012. Additional information is available at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/statistics.html>

Prior to the beginning of the swimming season, providers should make sure that all staff involved in taking clients on water activity outings know and understand the following Water Safety Guidelines from the American Red Cross. Develop a policy regarding water safety and make sure all staff have read and understand the policy.

The following are safety steps you should take before starting any activity in or near water:

- Learn about swimming, boating, and first aid, and be sure that others in your group also are informed. Contact your local American Red Cross chapter for information about swimming and first aid courses. To learn more about boating and water safety classes, call 1-800-336-BOAT (2628) or the check the Minnesota DNR’s website for a list of boating safety classes: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/education.html>
- Know local weather conditions and how to find out the weather forecast using local resources or the DNR’s website: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/current_conditions/index.html
- Choose a safe place for water recreation.
- Use Coast Guard-approved life jackets when boating.
- Look for potential water hazards.
- Know how to prevent, recognize, and care for hypothermia.
- Know how to prevent, recognize, and care for heat emergencies.

Ensure that clients use these basic safety tips whenever they swim in any body of water:

- Never swim alone. Swim with a buddy in a designated area that is supervised by lifeguards.
- Recheck the water and weather conditions on arrival and during your stay.
- Never drink alcohol and swim.
- Walk carefully into open waters; do not dive.
- Swim in a pool only if you can see the bottom at the deepest point.
- Learn the correct way to dive, and know when it is safe to dive.
- Have non-swimmers wear Coast Guard-approved life jackets while in the water.
- Keep an eye on weaker swimmers.
- Watch out for the dangerous “toos” - too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous playing.
- Stay out of the water when you are overheated.
- Do not chew gum or eat while you swim; you could easily choke.
- Use common sense about swimming after eating. In general, you do not have to wait an hour after eating before you may safely swim. However, if you have had a large meal, it is wise to let digestion start before beginning strenuous activity like swimming.

Know how to respond to a water emergency.

- Know where the lifeguards are.
- Know how and when to call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number.
- Get specialized training for the environment in which you will be swimming. For example, if swimming at a surf beach, check with the lifeguards to learn about and how to handle the conditions of the area.