

*"Giving Voice to Those Seldom Heard"*

## Water Safety Alert

This Medical Alert is based on the work of the Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Medical Review Subcommittee. 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 [Preliminary 2020 Minnesota Boating Accident and Drowning Summary \[PDF\]](https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/education_safety/safety/boatwater/accident_summary20.pdf) ([https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/education\\_safety/safety/boatwater/accident\\_summary20.pdf](https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/education_safety/safety/boatwater/accident_summary20.pdf)) from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, in 2020 there were 49 Non-Boating Drownings (up from 35 in 2019). In Minnesota in 2020, there were 16 Boating Fatalities (up from 10 in 2019), and 90 Non-Fatal Boating Accidents (as there were in 2019).

Before 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 Boat and water safety education website](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/education.html) (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/education.html>) for a list of online or in classroom boating safety classes, as well as the Minnesota Boating Guide.
- Know local weather conditions and how to find out the weather forecast using local resources or the [DNR Current Conditions website](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/current_conditions/index.html) ([http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/current\\_conditions/index.html](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 people with hypothermia, which can occur in the summer usually from swimming in water that is too cold or even from air conditioning.
- 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 beach with currents, such as those on Lake Superior, or in a river, check with the lifeguards to learn about and how to handle the conditions of the area. Additional information about conditions at Park Point Beach in Duluth can be found at:  
[Park Point Beaches: Real-time Weather and Beach Conditions](http://www.parkpointbeach.org) (http://www.parkpointbeach.org)
- Additional information about swimming in Minnesota State Parks can be found at:  
[Swimming Beaches | Minnesota DNR](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/starter_kit/beaches.html) (http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\_parks/starter\_kit/beaches.html)