

This alert is for those who work with people receiving services for mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities, and should be posted in facilities or shared with people as appropriate. It provides information regarding the potential hazards associated with being on or near water.

Summer brings many people outdoors, and especially to Minnesota's many bodies of waters, including lakes and swimming pools. There were 46 non-boating related drowning deaths in Minnesota in 2024. Before the beginning of the swimming season, facilities and programs should make sure that all staff who support clients with water activities know and understand the [Water Safety Guidelines](https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/water-safety.html) (https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/water-safety.html) from the American Red Cross. Develop a policy regarding water safety and make sure all staff have read and understand the policy.

Important things to know before starting an activity in or near water

- Learn about swimming, boating, and first aid, and be sure that others in your group are also informed.
- Know local weather conditions and how to find out the weather forecast using local resources or the [Current conditions | Minnesota DNR](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/current_conditions/index.html) (https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/current_conditions/index.html).
- Choose a safe place for water recreation, ideally with lifeguards present.
- Use appropriately sized, Coast Guard-approved life jackets when boating. None of the people who experienced a boating-related death in Minnesota in 2024 were wearing a life jacket.
- Look out for potential water hazards; storms can develop unexpectedly and lead to high winds, tall waves, and dangerous lightning.
- Know how to prevent, recognize, and care for people with hypothermia, which can occur even in the summer when swimming in water that is too cold. The water temperature of Lake Superior, for example, does not usually get any warmer than 65° in Duluth, which is up to 10° lower than many smaller lakes.
- Check current water quality monitoring results, and avoid water recreation when bacteria levels are high, when blue-green algae are present, and when signs are posted that a beach is closed.

Ensure that clients use these safety tips whenever they swim or are near a body of water

- **Drowning is silent!** Always keep an eye on clients, and never swim alone. Swim with a buddy in a designated area that is supervised by lifeguards whenever possible.
- Recheck the water and weather conditions on arrival and during your stay.
- Never use mind-altering substances when going for a swim.
- 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 or near the water.
- Do not chew gum or eat while swimming, as it can lead to choking.

Know how to respond to a water emergency

- Know where the lifeguards are.
- Know how and when to call 911.
- Get information specific to 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 lifeguards or local tourism agencies to learn how to handle the conditions of the area.

Helpful links

- [Boat and water safety | Minnesota DNR](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/index.html) (https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/index.html)
- [Guidelines for Healthy and Safe Swimming | Healthy Swimming | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-swimming/safety/index.html) (https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-swimming/safety/index.html)