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Water Safety: A Key to Keeping Your Loved Ones Safe This Summer

Summer is in full swing and families throughout the community are seizing the opportunity to hit the pool, beach, lake or water park to cool off and soak up some sun. Whether your next outing calls for snorkeling gear or an inflatable raft, don't forget to make water safety a priority, especially in areas where certified lifeguards aren't present.

Consider these 10 tips for staying safe in and around the water this summer:

1. Take a friend. Never swim or boat alone. Not only is swimming/boating with a buddy more enjoyable, it's also smarter. Having someone there to assist in an emergency may prove lifesaving.

2. Take swimming lessons. Self-reported statistics show that younger swimmers are typically better than older swimmers. If you are an adult who can't swim, consider a weekend swimming class. And if you have a child who has not yet learned to swim, sign them up for lessons as soon as possible. Learning to swim at an early age builds confidence and encourages water safety for a lifetime.

3. Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) when boating. According to the CDC, 72 percent of boating incidents are drowning incidents, and nine out of 10 people who die from such incidents aren't wearing personal flotation devices. Even if you're a strong swimmer, a PFD is a good idea when on the open water.

4. Install barriers and keep a close eye on children. Children between the ages of one and four, who drown in an at-home pool, are usually under parental supervision and out of sight for less than five minutes. Pool barriers can help restrict access to the pool. It is also important to teach children to ask before going near the water, and to remove pool toys, whenever possible, as they can attract a child's attention and draw them to the water.

5. Do not use air-filled toys as flotation devices. Pool noodles, water wings and blow-up rafts are not designed to be used in place of personal flotation devices. If you are on a boat, or are a new or unsure swimmer in any body of water, be certain to use a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device.

6. Know your limits. Swimming can be a lot of fun, but if you're not a strong swimmer, or if you're just learning to swim, don't go in water that's so deep you can't touch the bottom. And don't overdo it or try to keep up with skilled swimmers.

7. Learn CPR. Effective bystander CPR, provided immediately after sudden cardiac arrest, can double or even triple a victim's chance of survival. Need a crash course? Visit redcross.org or contact Sturgis Hospital for course offerings.

8. Don't mix alcohol and water activities. Alcohol use is involved in a large percentage of swimming and boating incidents. Alcohol can dull your judgment, response time, balance and the body's ability to stay warm. For this reason, it's best to forego alcohol if you are going to be in or around water.

9. Practice caution in natural water settings. Statistics show that as people get older, drowning incidents are more likely to occur in natural water settings. Be careful when boating or swimming in these areas. Unexpected rocks, branches, waves or water temperatures can easily take a swimmer or boater by surprise.

10. Pay attention to local weather reports. When at the beach or in natural water areas, pay attention to weather reports and know the color of the flags that warn beachgoers of potential threats. Keep an eye out for dangerous waves, debris and/or rocks.

“About 3,500 Americans drown each year, averaging 10 deaths per day, and more than one in five fatal drowning victims are children 14 and younger,” says Christine Delucas, RN, Clinical Operations practice leader at Quorum Health Resources.

“It's especially sad because most drowning cases we see could have been prevented with proper water safety, especially in at-home pools,” adds Dr. Tadd Heft, ER Medical Director at Sturgis Hospital. “Keep a close eye on children of all ages, enclose your pool, as appropriate, and never, ever swim alone.”

To learn more about keeping your family safe in the water, visit www.redcross.org.

This article courtesy of Sturgis Hospital and Quorum Health Resources.