



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH – GOVERNOR

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Gov. Blagojevich proclaims *Childhood Drowning Prevention Month* in Illinois; Initiative calls for public awareness to safeguard children

Leading cause of accidental death for young children can be prevented; Careful supervision of children near water saves lives

CHICAGO – Calling on caring citizens across the state to join a campaign to help keep children safe near water, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today proclaimed May as *Childhood Drowning Prevention Month* in Illinois.

“As a father, I know how much parents try to anticipate danger and do what they can to keep their kids out of harm’s way. During the month of May we take time to focus on preventing one of the leading causes of accidental death for children: drowning. Through careful supervision and awareness around water, we can protect young children from drowning,” said Gov. Blagojevich.

Nationally, drowning is the leading cause of accidental death among children ages 1 to 4, and the second leading cause for children 1 to 14. In Illinois, 17 children lost their lives to accidental drowning in 2006, following annual totals of 24 in 2005 and 21 in 2004. In response to these tragedies, and at the recommendation of Illinois’ Child Death Review Teams, Illinois in 2003 launched the “Get Water Wise...Supervise!” campaign, a collaborative effort of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Prevent Child Abuse Illinois (PCA Illinois), the American Red Cross Illinois Capital Area Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Illinois Department of Public Health (DPH). The campaign conducts a variety of activities to educate the public to prevent childhood drowning by providing adult supervision when children are in or near water. This year, the campaign has focused its commitment on building awareness that childhood drowning can affect any family - urban, suburban or rural – anywhere children and water are together.

“We know from painful experience that this loss can happen to any family, any time a child is near water,” said DCFS Acting Director Erwin McEwen. “These are good families who love their children and care for them well, only to make one tragic mistake when they step away to answer the phone or retrieve something from the family car. Many of us think of water safety as a concern only when children are near swimming pools; we need to understand that drowning can be a swift and silent occurrence, striking anywhere children come into contact with water.”

Less than half of recent Illinois accidental childhood drownings have taken place in swimming pools. Children are at risk anywhere water collects or is stored: in ditches, garden ponds, bathtubs, quarries, septic tanks, streams and farm ponds. Five-gallon buckets, such as those commonly used in home improvement projects, pose a special risk for toddlers with undeveloped upper body muscles, who may topple over headfirst into the bucket, unable to free themselves. Children can drown in as little as 2 inches of water, in as little time as 20 seconds. Even children who survive through resuscitation may suffer severe brain damage from the accident.

Illinois’ initiative to prevent these child deaths is based on thorough analysis of statewide data, which show that physical barriers are insufficient, and that careful supervision of children near any kind of water is necessary to succeed in saving lives. The state is supported in this effort by numerous local chapters of the American Red Cross, which provide community-based information and training, water safety and Learn-to-Swim classes.

“Our mission at the American Red Cross is to help people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies, and public education on water safety and drowning prevention is an essential part of that work,” said Chris Shanahan, Director of Community Health and Safety for the American Red Cross Capital Area Chapter. “We urge the public to contact their local American Red Cross Chapter to learn how they can help save lives in their community.”

The American Red Cross identifies 4 crucial elements to childhood water safety:

1. Maintain constant supervision. Watch children around any water environment (pool, stream, lake, tub, toilet, bucket of water,) no matter what skills your child has acquired and no matter how shallow the water. For younger children, practice “Reach Supervision” by staying within an arm's length reach.
2. Don’t rely on substitutes. The use of flotation devices and inflatable toys cannot replace parental supervision. Such devices could suddenly shift position, lose air, or slip out from underneath, leaving the child in a dangerous situation.
3. Enroll children in a water safety course or Learn-to-Swim classes. Your decision to provide your child with an early aquatic experience is a gift that will have infinite rewards. These courses encourage safe practices. You can also purchase a Water Safety Handbook at a Red Cross Store.
4. Parents should take a CPR course. Knowing these skills can be important around the water and you will expand your capabilities in providing care for your child. Contact your local Red Cross to enroll in a CPR course.

Text of the Governor's proclamation follows:

WHEREAS, drowning is the leading cause of accidental death for children ages 1-4, as well as the second leading cause of death for children under the age of 14; and,

WHEREAS, childhood drowning can occur in pools, bathtubs, hot tubs, decorative garden ponds and even buckets that contain as little as 2 inches of water, and,

WHEREAS, the state's annual "Get Water Wise...SUPERVISE!" campaign came about as a recommendation from the Illinois Child Death Review Team, after it determined that all childhood drowning deaths were preventable if proper adult supervision was provided; and

WHEREAS, the "Get Water Wise...SUPERVISE!" campaign is a collaborative effort of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Prevent Child Abuse Illinois (PCA Illinois), the American Red Cross Illinois Capital Area Chapter, the Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Illinois Department of Public Health (DPH) to remind the public to help prevent child drowning tragedies by providing adult supervision when children are in or near water; and,

WHEREAS, it is important to recognize that constant adult supervision is needed when children are in or near water;

Therefore I, Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim May 2007 as Childhood Drowning Prevention Month in Illinois.