

Get water wise... **SUPERVISE!**

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Contact: Katie Schlichter,

American Red Cross

217/522-3357, ext. 228

Statewide agencies urge the public to practice water safety during the upcoming Labor Day weekend

Springfield, IL – Labor Day is fast approaching and many families will spend the holiday weekend in or near water. While water recreation provides hours of fun for children and their families, it can also be a source of unintentional drowning if children are not adequately supervised or are improperly using water safety gear. Drowning remains the second leading cause of injury-related death among children ages 1 to 14. Be prepared to prevent a tragedy such as an accidental drowning, “Get Water wise...Supervise!”

“Get Water wise...Supervise!” is a public water safety campaign launched last year by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the American Red Cross Illinois Capital Area Chapter, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois (PCA Illinois), the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Illinois Department of Public Health (DPH).

“During this holiday weekend, families are usually drawn to beaches and swimming pools, which can result in larger crowds. That’s why adults need to protect children by keeping a watchful eye every moment they are in or near water,” said Roy Harley, Director of Prevent Child Abuse Illinois. “One aim of the coalition is to reinforce the message that supervision and vigilance have proven to be effective measures to prevent accidental drowning of children younger than 15 years of age.”

Last year in Illinois, 16 children died from accidental drownings. That includes one in a bathtub; one in a bucket; seven in a pool; five in a creek, river or pond; one in a quarry; and one from an unknown source.

Entering its second year of promoting child water safety, the coalition distributes informational brochures and posters, and conducts a variety of statewide activities to prevent childhood drowning in pools, bathtubs, lakes or other bodies of water.

“It only takes one inch of water for a child to drown. That’s why it is critically important never to leave a child alone in or near water,” said DCFS Director Bryan Samuels. “The old adage, ‘An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure’, really hits home when it comes to the preventable tragedy of childhood drowning,” he added.

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“Just one incident of a drowning child death is too many,” explained Director Samuels. “We want to continue to stress that adults need to be aware of the issue of water safety.”

The drowning prevention campaign came about as a recommendation from the Illinois Child Death Review Team. After reviewing deaths due to drowning, the team submitted recommendations to DCFS on the importance of a visible campaign to remind the public that drowning is a swift, silent occurrence that can be avoided when parents, guardians and other care providers exercise constant supervision of children in their care participating in water activities.

There are several things adults can do to prevent drowning. Each one is a step in the right direction but the more safety tips parents combine increases the ability to prevent an accident. Adults should:

- Keep residential pools locked
- Talk to your children about being safe in or near water
- Never leave children unsupervised in or around water
- Never allow young children to swim without adult supervision
- Adult supervisors should be responsible individuals, know how to swim and maintain continuous visual contact with the child they are supervising.

The Illinois Child Death Review Team Act became a law in 1994 and established nine Child Death Review Teams (CDRTs) in Illinois. The teams review cases where there may have been issues related to child abuse or neglect. The purpose of the review is to make recommendations that could prevent similar deaths in the future. The teams are multi-disciplinary, voluntary, and are facilitated through the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. All 102 counties are covered by one of the nine teams.

Posters and brochures are available in English and Spanish by calling 217/785-1700. To obtain these items or additional information, contact Katie Schlichter, community outreach and response director for the American Red Cross Illinois Capital Area Chapter, at 217/522-3357, ext. 228.

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