

Drowning Facts

United States

Drowning is one of the leading causes of unintentional injury death among all ages

In 2002, there were 3,447 unintentional drownings in the United States, averaging nine people per day*. This figure does not include drownings in boating-related incidents. The United States Coast Guard estimated that there were 710 boating-related drownings in 2003** (*CDC, 2004, **US Coast Guard, 2003).

Drowning is the second-leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 1 to 14 years. In 2002, 838 children, ages 0 to 14 years, died from drowning – about three children a day (CDC 2004).

According to the U.S. Lifesaving Association (USLA), if a lifeguard is present the chance of drowning at a beach is 1 in 18 million (USLA, 2005) .

In areas monitored by the USLA, 85% of fatal drownings at beaches occurred in times and areas where beaches were unguarded (USLA, 2005) .

Washington State

Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children in Washington (Child Drowning Prevention, WA State Department of Health, 2004).

Drowning rates have continued to decline over the past 20 years, but rates have been historically higher and are still higher than the national rate (The Health of Washington State, WA State Dept. of Health, July 2002).

The unintentional drowning rate for Washington was 1.6 per 100,000 in 2004. The Healthy People 2010 target rate for drowning is 0.9 per 100,000 (WA State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, 2006; Healthy People 2010).

In 2004, there were 97 unintentional drownings deaths in Washington (WA State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, 2006).

The 2004 Supplement to the *Health of Washington State* states that the risk for drowning increases among individuals with less formal education and higher poverty rates (*Health of Washington State* Supplement, WA Department of Health, 2004).

An average of 27 children and youth, under the age of 18, drown each year in Washington. Childhood drowning rates are highest for youth ages 15 –17 years old followed by children ages 1–4 years (*Child Drowning Prevention*, WA State Department of Health, 2004).

Drowning of children younger than five most often occurs in swimming pools and bathtubs (*The Health of Washington State*, WA State Dept. of Health, July 2002).

King County

In King County in 2005, 17 people unintentionally drowned. One was a child under the age of 18 (King County Medical Examiner's Office 2005).

Key Strategies to Prevent Drowning

- Drownings are preventable! Restricting swimming areas, providing proper signage, fencing pool areas and waterways, having lifeguard supervision, wearing life jackets, and carefully watching children while they bathe can eliminate most drownings.
- **KNOW YOUR LIMITS** – Drowning often happens when someone swims and gets too tired. Ways to be safe: take swim lessons, learn to float and tread water, swim in lifeguarded areas, have parental/adult supervision, and avoid swimming while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- **KNOW THE WATER** – Washington’s lakes and rivers are cold enough to cause hypothermia, even in the summer and even among the strongest swimmers. Ways to stay safe: wear a lifejacket, avoid swimming or boating in high running water, check water conditions, never dive or jump into unfamiliar or shallow water, and swim in designated areas only.
- **WEAR A LIFEJACKET** - 75% of boating fatalities could have been prevented if the victim was wearing a lifejacket. People tend to drown in silence and without attracting attention. Their struggle to breathe and stay afloat rarely enables them to wave their arms or call for help. Also,



Washington state law requires children 12 and under to wear a Coast Guard approved lifejacket or life vest on vessels less than 19 feet long.

For More Information

- **Injury and Violence Prevention, Public Health- Seattle & King County**
Pool and Water Safety
<http://www.metrokc.gov/health/injury/drowning.htm>
- **Children’s Hospital and Regional Medical Center**
Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Information
www.seattlechildrens.org/dp/ or www.drowning-prevention.org
- **American Red Cross Serving King and Kitsap Counties**
Home and Family Safety Tips
www.seattleredcross.org/health/safety
- **Washington State Parks**
Boating Program
www.parks.wa.gov/boating.asp
- **Army Corps of Engineers**
National Water Safety Program
<http://watersafety.usace.army.mil>



Updated by Amy Dietz & Deanne Boisvert
Public Health-Seattle & King County
Violence & Injury Prevention
401 5th Ave, Suite 0900
Seattle, WA 98104
April 2006