

Staying Safe on the Water

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC—safer, healthier people.

[Marcus Durham] Summer's finally here. That might mean you're going to be on the water, in the water, or on the road. Maybe you're planning to enjoy a little bit of it all. This podcast on Summertime Safety was created to bring you information from CDC's Injury Center to help keep you and your family safe and well. We hope you enjoy your summer and all the activities that go along with the season.

Dr. Julie Gilchrist, a pediatrician and medical epidemiologist at CDC's Injury Center, is here to talk with us about staying safe on the water. Thanks for being here today, Dr. Gilchrist.

[Dr. Gilchrist] Thanks for having me.

[Marcus Durham] Dr. Gilchrist, what is the most important thing people need to know about safe boating?

[Dr. Gilchrist] Anyone going out on any type of boat, regardless of the distance they're traveling or how developed their swimming skills are should wear a life jacket- sometimes referred to as a personal flotation device, or PFD. Just by wearing a life jacket when you're boating, you can dramatically increase your chances of surviving an incident. And, now, they come in more comfortable styles that are great for wearing all day.

In 2006, 3,500 people reported being injured and 710 died in boating incidents. Of those who drowned, only one in ten was wearing a life jacket.

[Marcus Durham] Are people who are injured or killed in boating incidents usually in a particular type of boat?

[Dr. Gilchrist] About half the incidents involved open motor boats, but a quarter were in personal watercraft, like jet skis. There are also reported injuries and deaths in canoes and kayaks.

[Marcus Durham] Besides wearing life jackets at all times, what else should boaters keep in mind when they're out on the water?

[Dr. Gilchrist] The CDC recommends a number of precautions.

First: avoid drinking alcohol, whether you are driving the boat or just a passenger. Alcohol affects balance, judgment and coordination, which are all necessary for safe boating..

Second: complete an education course, which is like a "rules of the road" course for the safe operation and navigation of recreational boats.

Third, Get a vessel safety check... it's free! The U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S Power Squadron provide these checks as a public service. Volunteer personnel will check the safety equipment and help you understand what to do if something happens and particulars you need to know to boat safely in your area. You can learn more on the program's Web site at www.vesselsafetycheck.org.

Finally, be aware of the risk of carbon-monoxide poisoning. Carbon Monoxide- or CO- is a colorless, odorless gas that all internal combustion engines produce. The early symptoms are similar to seasickness, and CO can kill in a matter of minutes. CO poisoning can pose a risk when you're using a generator to power things like an air-conditioner, or if you're running a gas-powered engine, especially without proper cabin ventilation. Also, you could be at risk if you're swimming or floating near an idling engine.

To prevent CO poisoning, know the risks, make sure you have good ventilation, install your equipment properly and keep it well-maintained. And, don't forget to use a CO detector, especially if your boat has living and sleeping areas.

[Marcus Durham] Dr. Gilchrist, thanks so much for your time today. Remember, for more information on safe boating and injury prevention, visit www.cdc.gov/injury.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.