

THE MEGAPHONE

[thoughts on **WATER SAFETY**]

Promoting the voices of Manitoba's children and youth

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WATER SAFETY... A COMMUNITY-WIDE ISSUE

Many communities around Manitoba are located near bodies of water. In fact, our province is known for having more than 100,000 lakes, including Lake Winnipeg, the third largest lake in all of Canada.² Lakes, streams, rivers, and ponds contribute to the incredible beauty and wealth of resources in our province. However, close proximity to so much water carries inherent risk as well. As part of our office's overall responsibilities in reviewing the deaths of children in Manitoba, every year at the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA), we are notified of children who have drowned.

Between 2009-2014, 19 Manitoba children died from drowning. 13 of those children were younger than six years old.

According to the Canadian Red Cross, "Children in the Prairie provinces are 22% more likely to drown than...children across Canada."³ The same study reports that between 2001 and 2010, 570 Canadian children died from drowning and children aged 1 to 4 years old are at the highest risk.⁴

Although we begin teaching children at a young age to be safe, we do not rely on these lessons as our only strategy for keeping them safe. We teach our toddlers to stop before venturing onto the street, to look for cars, where and how to cross safely and not to play on the street. Children need consistent guidance and supervision from adults to develop an awareness of dangers that might exist and to better understand how to play safely. The Canadian Red Cross states that the only way to keep children safe in and around water is through constant adult supervision.

The Canadian Paediatric Society released a position statement about toddlers aged two to four, in February, 2007: "There is no evidence that swimming lessons prevent drowning or near drowning in this age group. Although it may be possible to teach young infants basic motor skills for water, infants cannot be expected to learn the elements of water safety or to react appropriately in emergencies. **No young child, particularly those who are preschool aged, can ever be considered 'water safe'.**"⁷

For more info, check out the full statement from the Canadian Paediatric Society:
<http://www.cps.ca/english/statements/ip/ip03-01.htm>

Recent research has shown that First Nations toddlers are one of the populations at greatest risk of drowning in Manitoba.⁹

DO YOU LIVE CLOSE TO WATER?

"Aboriginal people are at higher risk of drowning because many First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities are located close to rivers, lakes and oceans and because of the variety of activities taking place in, on and around the water; from boat travel to fishing, from snowmobiling to swimming.

Northern and isolated communities are more at risk because of the colder water temperature. They also have limited access to swimming lessons and lifesaving training. Education, awareness and changes to waterfronts and the surrounding environment can work together to prevent injuries. The injury death rate among Aboriginal infants and children has been reported as **ALMOST FOUR TIMES HIGHER THAN THAT OF THE REST OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION** - more than five times higher in preschool-aged children, and more than three times higher in teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19."⁸

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ACTIVE SUPERVISION

When children drown it is often the result of a lack of supervision or brief supervisor distraction. The World Health Organization states that a lapse in adult supervision is the largest contributor to child drowning. In Manitoba, recent findings demonstrate that over half of pediatric drowning victims were alone at the time of the incident, and half occurred during a momentary lapse in supervision. Parents may substitute sibling supervision, which is inadequate. One study found that all bathtub drowning among children less than five years of age were associated with supervision by a sibling less than seven years of age. Canadian data show that toddlers were supervised by a minor in 17% of drowning cases.¹⁰

In Manitoba First Nations communities, drowning and submersion is the third leading cause of injury death.

These higher drowning rates have been attributed to higher rates of alcohol use and higher PFD non-use documented in First Nations drowning victims compared to non-First Nations populations. The magnitude of the difference between First Nations and non-First Nations Manitobans is evident when mortality rates are examined. Drowning is four times more likely in First Nations Manitobans (8.8 deaths per 100,000 vs. 2.0). This drowning mortality discrepancy is much (6.5X) greater when First Nations and non-First Nations children are compared (12.4 vs. 1.9 per 100,000 respectively).¹¹

For every toddler who drowns, **ANOTHER 6 TO 10 ARE HOSPITALIZED** because of near drowning. Twenty percent of these children suffer **PERMANENT BRAIN DAMAGE**.¹²

If you're not within arms' reach, you've gone too far!

Colour the Picture



Stay tub-side until all the water is drained and you have removed your child from the tub. Drain bathtubs when they are not in use.

Parents, you are your child's lifeguard in the bathtub!

"Shallow water diving is the most frequent cause of severe water-related injury not resulting in drowning."¹³



...WHAT ABOUT BOAT SAFETY?

LIFE JACKETS, OR PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFDs):

PROVEN TO REDUCE INJURY AND DEATH

- 90% of boaters who drown are NOT wearing a personal flotation device (PFD). To Stay Safe, wear a PFD while boating. It is law that all boaters must have a properly fitting PFD on board.
- A Canadian-approved flotation device has a stamp or label that tells you it is approved by either the Department of Transport (DOT) or the Canadian Coast Guard. If you change or repair a flotation device in any way, it is no longer approved.
- A PFD is designed to keep you afloat in the water. It will also help reduce the symptoms of hypothermia.
- For any PFD to work, all buckles, zippers and ties must be fastened and adjusted properly.
- Whistles should be attached to your PFD.
- To keep your PFD in good condition, inspect it regularly, keep it in a well-ventilated area and be sure to wash off any detergents (chlorine) or salt.
- There are three types of approved flotation devices: life jackets (available in youth and adult sizes, when worn properly will turn an unconscious person onto his/her back), PFDs (more comfortable than life jackets and come in child sizes), and inflatable PFDs (approved if you are 16 years of age and weigh more than 36kg, must be worn at all times).

People choose to not wear a PFD/Life jacket for a number of reasons: unattractive, awkward, not necessary, ineffective, having it close by is fine, want to get a suntan, believe they are a good swimmer, I'm close to shore.¹⁶

BUT...Did you Know:

THE MAJORITY OF KIDS WHO DROWN ARE NOT WEARING A LIFE JACKET.¹⁷



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BOAT SAFETY EQUIPMENT

For your safety and required by law, the Canadian Coast Guard, **REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING 8 PIECES OF EQUIPMENT** on powerboats less than 6 metres (20 feet):

Each person needs a lifejacket/PFD

A buoyant heaving line (floating rope)

One manual propelling device (e.g. paddle/oar)

Bailer or manual pump

Class 5BC fire extinguisher

Distress equipment (flashlight or flares)

Sound device (e.g. whistle/airhorn)

Navigation lights (if boat is used between sunset and sunrise, plus in fog)



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If the boat is powered (including Personal Water Crafts--such as SeaDoos) it requires the above equipment PLUS a watertight flashlight or flares.²¹

"1 in 2 parents think they can effectively supervise kids in the water by **LISTENING** for signs of problems.

CHILDREN WHO DROWN ARE OFTEN SILENT."¹⁹

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION IDEAS!

Where are the water hazards in your own community?

Do people understand the risk?

What can be done to improve safety for these areas?

Can signs be placed?

How are children & community members taught about water safety?

Who has lifesaving and CPR training?

Could further training be brought into community?²²



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DO YOU MIX BOATING AND ALCOHOL?

According to the Canadian Red Cross, "Every year hundreds of people die as a result of boating related activities. Almost 65% of these deaths involve the use of alcohol. **THERE IS NO SAFE WAY TO MIX ALCOHOL AND DRUGS WITH BOATING.**

THE FACTS:

- Many people who would never drive their car after drinking alcohol, don't think twice about combining boating and alcohol.
- Alcohol is a factor in over 40% of recreational boating fatalities.

Many people think it's okay to drink and boat - it's not. Drinking and boating is just as illegal as drinking and driving, and can be even more dangerous.

BE RESPONSIBLE!

- Don't allow a person who has consumed alcohol to operate a boat.
- Provide non-alcoholic beverages for boat operators and passengers.
- Wear lifejackets or Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs). It's the law to carry one that fits each person in the vessel, but Red Cross recommends wearing it every trip, for the whole trip.²⁴

1 in 3 kids who
drown were not ex-
pected to be
in the water.²⁶

4 in 10
children drown in
water less than
1 metre deep.

More than
90% of kids who drown
in shallow water are not
with an adult.²⁷



Meet **BUCKLES!**
The Canadian Red Cross
mascot for water safety!

Drowning Prevention Best Practices & Recommendations

- Wear PFD/lifejacket when boating.
- Promote PFD/lifejacket use with children & in your community.
- Arms-length adult supervision of young children near water.
- Fence around water where possible, Post signs where possible.
- Drowning prevention is a community-wide concern.
- Eliminate standing water in the home & yard.
- Enhance training for caregivers (swim lessons, lifesaving, CPR, first aid).
- Swim lessons once a child is four years old. However, infants, toddlers, and caregivers can benefit from earlier water safety programs.
- Don't mix alcohol with swimming or boating.
- Promote public education on issues related to water safety and drowning prevention.²⁸



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