



Lewis County Public Health & Social Services

Health Beat

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Swim Safely This Summer

Summer is finally here, and many Lewis County residents will be heading to the beach, the pool, or to one of our county's many beautiful rivers, lakes and streams. There are some things to help you stay safe, however, before you take the plunge.

For one thing, while the sunshine is warm, the water is often still very cold. The shock of jumping into cold water can be enough to make muscles stop working—including heart muscles. The huge amount of snow in the mountains and all the rain this winter mean that many rivers are running cold and deep this year, so for now, choose other places to recreate in the water. There are some other simple steps you can take to help keep your summer in the water a safe one:

- Never swim alone. Always have someone with you who can call for help if an emergency arises.
- Wear a life-jacket. Anyone who's out on a river, lake, open water, or even in a pool without a life guard, should wear a life jacket. Infants and children should always wear life jackets. Other devices that are intended to help keep people afloat, like "noodles" or "water wings" aren't reliable. On boats, life-jackets for children 12 and under is the law.
- Always keep your eye on kids in, or near, the water. Take turns with other adults, if possible, to avoid fatigue, and stay within easy reach of the kids.
- Take swimming lessons to become a stronger swimmer. Classes can be found at Thorbeckes Fitness Center in Centralia and the Gail and Carolyn Shaw Aquatics Center in Chehalis.
- Take a CPR class to help you be prepared for a variety of emergency situations. These are offered through the Red Cross, and local fire departments. Find local instructors at <http://www.lewiscountymems.com/first-aid-and-cpr-classes.html>
- Don't drink or do drugs while participating in water activities. Alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs, make it harder for people to recognize danger, and react quickly.

One of the choices you can make to have a safer swimming season is to choose places to swim where there's a lifeguard. Lifeguards are trained to look for signs of drowning, and know what to do when someone is in trouble. The truth is, unless you know what to look for, drowning can sometimes go un-noticed. Unlike on television, where a drowning person may kick and scream,

in real life a drowning person is often quiet. They're struggling too hard to stay above the water, to kick or yell. They may stretch out their arms, or bob up and down, which can look almost calm, or even like playing. Time is of the essence to a drowning person, and having a professional lifeguard to watch the water, and act as back up to alert adults, can make a big difference.

If you have any cuts, or open wounds, bandage them well, and if you can, cover the bandage with waterproof tape. For the sake of community health, and out of respect for other swimmers, don't go in the water if you've been sick with vomiting or diarrhea.

Choose a place to swim that you're familiar with, and don't forget to do your research. Algae blooms happen in local lakes, and along our shorelines, and sometimes these algae can produce toxins that may make people, and pets, sick. Look for official warning signs before entering the water. Once you're prepared, it's time to pack up your picnic basket, water bottles, safe sunscreen, and go out to play in the water, but while you're out having fun, be sure to remember these simple steps to make it a safer summer too.

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