



# News Release

**For immediate release:** May 22, 2014

(14-072)

Contacts: [Marqise Allen](#), Communications Office  
[Kelly Stowe](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072

360-236-4022

## **Warm spring weather and cold, fast-moving water increase drowning risks**

**OLYMPIA** — As people start to flock to local beaches, lakes, and rivers with the warmer weather, the state Department of Health urges parents to talk to their kids about water safety. In late spring, water is extremely cold and mountain snowmelt creates fast-moving, debris-filled rivers and streams that increase the hazards for rafting, kayaking, and swimming.

“Too many drowning tragedies happen this time of year, and we want parents to make certain their kids understand how to avoid danger,” said State Health Officer, Dr. Kathy Lofy. “It’s important for kids to be active and enjoy water activities, and it’s essential that parents prepare them for safety before they go.”

Drowning among teens and young adults often happen when they misjudge distance, current, or temperature of the water. When fatigue or hypothermia set in, it takes only a few minutes before a person goes underwater. After going under, swimmers can lose consciousness in about two minutes, and suffer permanent brain damage after only four minutes.

Reviews of drowning deaths over several years show that 70 percent happened in open water (lakes, rivers, ponds, creeks, or Puget Sound). It’s natural for young people to push boundaries, compete with their friends, and take on challenges that show their strength, endurance, or bravery. And many young people don’t believe that their actions will lead to injury or death.

“Be direct – tell them that teens, especially boys, never expect that they’ll be the one who ends up as a tragic drowning statistic,” Lofy said. “Show them how to identify dangers and how they can make choices that avoid the risk.”

About 100 people in Washington die each year from drowning. Males in our state are more likely to die from drowning than females. Last year, all drowning deaths in our state among people between the ages of 15 and 24 were men.

Alcohol use is involved in up to half of teen and adult drowning deaths. Alcohol decreases a person's balance, coordination, and judgment. Sun exposure, wave action, and heat can heighten the effects of alcohol.

It's important for parents to set family expectations about water safety rules. Make sure everyone in the family knows how to swim, has access to a life jacket, and understands what to do in an emergency. By making sure children understand drowning risks and take steps to be safe, parents can help keep kids out of harm's way. More [drowning prevention tips](#) are on the agency website.

The [Department of Health website](#) ([www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

###