



# News Release

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## **Water safety: fast currents and frigid temps make being out on the water more dangerous this time of year**

**OLYMPIA** — Cold and fast waters can be a recipe for drowning and state health officials remind folks that even though the calendar says it's close to Memorial Day, water temperatures are frigid and river flows are swift.

Many Washingtonians wait for hot weather to dip their toes into lakes, rivers, and the ocean surf, but other people brave the frosty waters and hop into boats, inner tubes, and other floating equipment in search of a late-spring water adventure. Being unprepared for the freezing water temperatures or the swift flow of the waters can lead to tragedy.

State health officials say that all too often people who are out on the water this time of year are unprepared for the conditions and even the most avid swimmer can experience an uncontrollable, shock-like response when coming in contact with frigid waters. Hypothermia can happen very quickly in cold water.

[Springtime river flow is high and swift](#) from rain and snow melt and can easily overwhelm the strongest swimmer. Though snowpack is low in Washington this year, rivers will likely be lower than normal, water is still cold and dangerous for swimmers, even on hot spring days.

The most important safety step for water activities is to wear a life vest or other [Coast Guard-approved](#) personal floatation device.

[A study of Washington boaters](#) showed the use of life vests and other floatation devices was highest for the youngest boat occupants: 89 percent of children age 0-5, 80 percent of children ages 6-12, dropping to 50 among youth ages 13-17. Only 20 percent of people 18 and older wore a floatation device. People on a boat may not expect to end up in the water; however, weather and water conditions can change in an instant, putting people in harm's way.

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Children and youth on a boat with an adult who was not wearing a life vest were far less likely to be wearing a life vest themselves; only 3 percent wore a personal floatation device, versus 87 percent of those who were with an adult who was wearing a life vest.

Other tips and safety information is available on the [Department of Health's Drowning and Injury Prevention Program webpages](#).

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

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