

DDS Water Safety Precautions Guidelines

Prior to any aquatic activities, staff must be familiar with each individual's medical status and any contraindications. Staff who support individuals to participate in aquatic activities should be aware of the following hazards and take appropriate precautions:

- A. **Sun Exposure**: All individuals must have sunscreen applied on exposed areas of their bodies – preferably one half-hour prior to exposure. This should be reapplied as directed. Staff should know which medications individuals are taking as some medications may cause increased sun-sensitivity. If documentation indicates that the individual cannot have sunscreen applied for medical reasons, an alternate plan to protect them from sun exposure should be written and placed with their Aquatic Activity Screening.
- B. **Medical conditions**: Information about specific medical conditions should be included on the Aquatic Activity Screening form. Staff should make sure the individual is approved for swimming or other aquatic related activities. Some people with cardiac conditions, feeding tubes, epilepsy, etc., are not approved for aquatic activities. If there is a question, staff should check with the individual's physician and include the specific restrictions in the Aquatic Activity Screening. Those individuals with special handicapping conditions must be in line of sight at all times and/or (1) have a direct companion in the water, and/or (2) use a floatation device or lifejacket (based upon the person's individual screening).
- C. **Use of Lifejackets**: Lifejackets may be necessary for individuals who use wheelchairs, are unsteady on their feet, etc. The type of lifejacket (jacket or vest style) should be indicated in the individual's Aquatic Activity Screening. Lifejackets, also called PFD's (Personal Floatation Devices), are not allowed at some locations. Staff should call ahead or speak to the lifeguard on duty to explain circumstances for needed use. PFD's do not take the place of supervising the individuals.
- D. **Hypothermia**: Cold water can cause the body to lose heat resulting in below normal body core temperature. It can also set in quickly on warm days. Individuals who are physically disabled or not overly active in the water will succumb to hypothermia more quickly. Some of the signs include uncontrollable shivering, purple or blue lips and/or fingernails, and deep breathing. At first sign, staff should remove the individual from the water to warm up. Many individuals may not realize what is happening when symptoms begin, so it is up to staff to observe closely and act at first sign.
- E. **Jellyfish**: Jellyfish and Portuguese man-of-war are predominately seen on the shores in both shallow and deep water when the water is warmest. The tentacles sting, so they should be avoided. Signs and symptoms of a sting can include discomfort, redness, and/or swelling of a particular area of the body. Medical treatment should be sought immediately if an individual is stung.
- F. **Waves**: Ocean waves can cause danger to even the most experienced swimmers as one tires more easily when swimming among waves. Waves can also knock a small or unsteady person over. Caution should be exercised.

- G. Slopes/Below surface hazards:** Staff should always check unfamiliar swim areas below the surface for sudden drops from shallow to deep water or for hidden obstructions such as rocks, water weeds, grass, kelp, stumps, etc. Checking the slopes of swimming pools is also important so that staff can adequately supervise the individuals in relation to their swimming abilities.
- H. Currents:** Undertows (backwash of water underneath waves) can knock someone off balance, which could cause them to get caught in a current. A littoral current is one, which drifts sideways and runs parallel to the shore. Due to the strength and speed of these currents, they can cause problems for both experienced and inexperienced swimmers or those in rafts, tubes, etc. Staff should be aware of currents in the area where the aquatic activity takes place.
- I. Sandbars:** In the ocean, sandbars can be a lot of fun because one can walk out very far from the shore during low tides. Sandbars are found when the depth of the water leading out to the sandbar is deeper than the sandbar itself. Caution should be used in returning to shore before the tide begins to rise rapidly as this could pose a problem for non-swimmers to return to the shore.
- J. Jetties/permanent rafts:** Jetties look like long docks but can be dangerous due to algae build up, making them slippery. Rafts are fun to jump or dive off of but should not be used for this purpose during low tides where the water may be less than eight (8) feet deep. Individuals should be closely supervised and staff must be out on the raft with them.
- K. Electrical storms:** At the first sign of a storm, staff should lead individuals to a safe area to seek shelter. Staff should never allow individuals to remain in the water or on the beach or to go under a tree during an electrical storm.
- L. Buoys/ropes:** Staff should not allow individuals to venture out of a roped area or hang on ropes/buoys. Buoys and ropes may be slippery, have algae build up or have old fishing lines caught on them.
- M. Shells/wash up:** If individuals are unable to navigate themselves while walking on the beach, the use of water shoes is recommended to prevent injuries and avoid possible cuts from shells or glass.