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Virginia Department of Health Stresses Safety Tips for Recreational Water Activities
May 22-28 is Recreational Water Awareness Week

(Richmond, Va.) With the arrival of warm weather, recreational water activity in Virginia increases. The Virginia Department of Health reminds people to take precautions and follow a few simple guidelines to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience during recreational water activities.

“We encourage people to enjoy activities in the water this summer,” said State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP. “At the same time, people should use caution in and around the water to make sure that they stay healthy and safe.”

To prevent injury and drowning take the following precautions:

- Never leave a child alone near a standing body of water, and always designate a responsible adult to watch children swimming or playing in or around the water.
- Make sure that your swimming pool area is separated from the house and play area by a four-sided fence with self-closing and self-latching gates.
- To prevent underwater entrapment, ensure that your pool contains suction drain covers that meet applicable regulations.
- When boating in open waters, be sure to wear U.S. Coast Guard- approved life jackets, regardless of the distance to be traveled, the size of the boat, or the swimming ability of the boaters.
- With any recreational water activity, always use the buddy system, be aware of local weather conditions, do not consume alcohol before and during recreational water activities, avoid swimming after dark, do not dive into unknown or shallow areas, and watch out for dangerous waves or rip currents.

It is also important to take precautions to prevent the spread of germs. Swallowing or coming into contact with contaminated water in swimming pools, hot tubs, water parks, water play areas, fountains, lakes, rivers, or oceans can cause illness. The most common of these are gastrointestinal and may include nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Other illnesses associated with recreational water can result in eye, skin, ear, respiratory, neurologic, and wound infections.

Follow these healthy swimming guidelines to help protect you, your family, and other swimmers from illness:

- Look for swimming advisory signs before entering the water. These may indicate that the bacterial levels in the water are unsafe for recreational activity.
- During hot summer months, caution is recommended regarding swimming in stagnant or shallow freshwater.
- Avoid getting water in your mouth or having water shoot up your nose. Do not swallow pool, lake, river, or ocean water.
- Don't swim when you are ill. You can spread germs in the water and make other people sick.
- Shower with soap before swimming and wash your hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers. Germs on your body can end up in the water.
- Make sure your children have bathroom breaks, and check diapers often. Waiting to hear "I have to go" might be too late.
- Do not change diapers poolside or at a sandy beach. Instead, change diapers in the bathroom or at a diaper-changing station.
- Wash your child thoroughly with soap and water before swimming.

Protect against skin damage and skin cancer by using sunscreen with sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher, and both UVA and UVB protection. Wear clothing to protect exposed skin, a hat with a wide brim to shade the face, head, ears, and neck and sunglasses that wrap around and block as close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays as possible.

Fast facts on water safety:

- In 2011, 60 unintentional drowning deaths occurred in Virginia's natural waters (ocean, rivers, lakes, etc.).
- Ten unintentional drowning deaths related to pools or hot tubs were reported.
- Almost 20 percent of all reported drowning deaths occurred in children.
- For every child who drowned in 2010, four received emergency medical care for non-fatal submersion injuries. Such non-fatal injuries can result in long-term damages including memory problems and learning disabilities.

For more information on recreational water illness prevention, visit

www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/

For more information on swimming advisories in coastal waters, please visit

www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/DEE/BeachMonitoring/

For more information on drowning prevention, visit

www.cdc.gov/safecild/Drowning/index.html

OR

www.poolsafely.gov/parents-families/

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