



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

For immediate release

LIFESAVING SOCIETY CONCERNED ABOUT INCREASED DROWNING AMONG BABY BOOMERS

National Drowning Prevention Week, July 20–28, 2013

Toronto, ON – July 15, 2013: At the mid-summer mark, the Lifesaving Society reports that 56 people have drowned in Ontario this year up from 49 in 2012. This number includes a concerning increase in drowning deaths of baby boomers. So far this year, 12 50-64-year-olds have drowned versus 7 in 2012. An aging population is a contributing factor in this increase. The Society encourages people of all ages to be cautious around water, and reminds Ontarians to never swim alone, regardless of age or ability.

The Society's 2013 Canadian Drowning Report recorded a 34% spike in 2006-2010 baby boomer drownings (over the previous five-year period) and a 7% increase in overall drownings during the same period.

"Baby boomers now account for more drownings in Canada than any other age group," says Barbara Byers, public education director for the Lifesaving Society. "Boomers may be reticent to admit their vulnerabilities and that puts them in danger as they continue to participate in high-risk behaviours around water adopted from their youth, despite reduced physical capabilities."

It is crucial for baby boomers to assess their physical capabilities before embarking on the water. Many have medical conditions or use medications that can affect their swimming abilities. In this older life stage fishing, powerboating and bathing are the most prevalent causes of drowning, followed by swimming and walking near water. Two-thirds of victims in this age group were alone when their fatal incident occurred.

The Lifesaving Society is also concerned about drownings among risk-taking 15-19-year-olds. So far in 2013 there have been 8 drowning victims in this age group, versus 3 in 2012.

"Parents often overestimate their teens' swimming abilities and underestimate their inclination to take risks," says Byers. "Teen brains are under construction. The thrill seeking, pleasure seeking part of their brain is developing at a faster rate than the judgment and impulse inhibition skills that adults have."

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Byers points to the risk-taking 18-to 24-year-olds who continue to have the highest water-related death rate of any age group in Canada at 2.2 per 100,000. "We need to ensure that teens have swimming survival skills and knowledge to keep themselves and their friends safe when their brain physiology puts them at risk around water," she says. "Our new Swim to Survive+™ program aims to arm pre-teens with swimming survival skills that will keep them safe as teens and into early adulthood. We are introducing this program in the fall."

During National Drowning Prevention Week from July 20–28, the Lifesaving Society has these important water safety messages:

Boomers – recognize your limits

Be realistic about your physical limitations as you age. Know your heart health through regular check-ups and don't "push the envelope" any more on, in or near the water, than you would at home. Take care getting in and out of bathtubs. Install grab-bars designed for weight-bearing to aid entry, exit and movement in your bathtub. Have someone close enough to hear you and respond, should you have a problem.

Parents – If you are not within arms' reach, you've gone too far.

Never leave children alone near water and keep them in your sight. If children are at the water's edge a responsible guardian needs to be with them. It only takes only a second for the unthinkable to happen. While you turn your back to reach for a snack out of your cooler, your child could be gone forever. Assign an adult to supervise children whenever they are near or in the water and always be vigilant. Put lifejackets on young toddlers when they are near the water.

Everyone – get the training

Everyone should learn to swim. Then take a lifesaving course such as the Lifesaving Society Bronze Medallion.

Everyone – always swim with a buddy

Regardless of age and swimming ability, no one should swim alone. Young children require constant, direct supervision around water, and older teens and adults should have someone watching them as well. Drowning is silent, fast and can happen to anyone.

Choose it. Use it.

Always ensure that lifejackets fit properly and are in good working condition. All buckles and zippers should be functioning and intact. Everyone should wear lifejackets while boating and anyone who cannot swim should wear a lifejacket while swimming.

Learn how to Swim to Survive

Swimming is an essential life skill and all Canadians should be able to Swim to Survive. Given the increase in deaths following an unexpected fall into deep water, it is crucial that people safeguard themselves from drowning. The Lifesaving Society's Swim to Survive standard is: ROLL into deep water – TREAD water for 60 seconds – SWIM 50 metres. This is the minimum standard necessary to survive an unexpected fall into deep water. Swim to Survive lessons are offered throughout the province.

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Ontario drownings between Jan 1 and July 12

Preliminary, interim data from media releases, media clippings, news reports and internet searches.

	2012	2013
TOTAL DROWNINGS	49	56
CHILDREN 0-4	3	3
CHILDREN 5-14	0	2
TEENS 15-19	3	8
ADULTS 20-34	17	12
ADULTS 35-49	9	13
ADULTS 50-64	7	12
ADULTS 65+	8	6
AGE UNKNOWN	2	-
MALES	45	43
FEMALES	4	13
PRIVATE POOL	2	4
AQUATIC (swimming/diving/jumping/wading)	13	17
NON-AQUATIC (near or on water and fell in)	22	9
BOATING (boat or other watercraft)	9	10
OTHER TRANSPORTATION (car, aircraft, snowmobile, ATV)	5	20

About the Lifesaving Society

The Lifesaving Society is a full-service provider of programs, products and services designed to prevent drowning. We save lives and prevent water-related injury through our training programs, Water Smart® public education, drowning prevention research, aquatic safety management and lifesaving sport. Each year, over 1,000,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguard and leadership programs. For more information, visit www.lifesavingsociety.com.

About Swim to Survive

The Swim to Survive program was launched in 2005. Swim to Survive teaches children three basic skills in sequence: ROLL into deep water; TREAD water for one minute; and SWIM 50 m (statistics show that most people who drown are less than 15 m from shore or

safety). It is not meant as a replacement for standard swimming lessons; however the program is an important first step to being safe around water and could make the difference between life and death when immersion in water is sudden and unexpected. Educational resources include a video on YouTube in eight different languages.

About Swim to Survive+ (Plus)

In 2012, the Lifesaving Society developed the *Swim to Survive+* program for children in Grade 7. *Swim to Survive+* builds on the skills taught in the original Swim to Survive program. The + (plus) means students are taught to ROLL, TREAD and SWIM with CLOTHES ON.

In addition, Swim to Survive+ teaches kids how to assist a friend who may have accidentally fallen into deep water. Students are taught three low-risk rescue skills: TALK, THROW and REACH.

In addition to the more rigorous fitness component (ROLL, TREAD and SWIM while wearing clothes) Swim to Survive+ requires students to complete a fitness swim to help build stamina.

About the 2013 Canadian Drowning Report

The Lifesaving Society's 2013 Canadian Drowning Report (available at www.lifesavingsociety.com) analyzes data extracted from the offices of the Chief Coroners and Medical Examiners in each province/territory up to 2010 – the most recent year from which complete information is available. The report includes only preventable (unintentional) deaths – not deaths due to natural causes, suicide or homicide.

The Canadian Drowning Report also presents preliminary interim data for 2011 and 2012 derived from media releases, media clippings, news reports and internet searches.

To schedule an interview, or for more information, please contact:

Barbara Byers - barbarab@lifeguarding.com

Lifesaving Society: 416-490-8844 (bus.), ext. 259 or 416-727-5636 (cell)