



Water Safety Campaign: Communications Toolkit

Summer 2025

Introduction

This is a communications toolkit with messages and information related to water safety, created for Metro's community partners and anyone interested in sharing water safety messaging. Please share these messages with people you serve and with your social media followers throughout the summer. We will update this toolkit each year before the season begins.

In this toolkit

- [Videos](#)
- [Photos and infographics](#)
- [Talking points with calls-to-action](#)

Calendar for sharing content. Please share ahead of major holidays and when we expect to have heat waves in the region.

Memorial Day: Monday, May 26

Juneteenth: Thursday, June 19

Fourth of July: Friday, July 4

Labor Day: Monday, Sept. 1

Hashtags Please capitalize the first letter of each word for accessibility.

#LifeJacketsAreForEveryone #WearALifeJacket #LifeJacketsSaveLives

Website oregonmetro.gov/WaterSafety

Feel free to add this link in your post to direct people to a water safety resource.

Target audience Our target audience is people most vulnerable to drowning. Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latine and Indigenous people are disproportionately drowning victims.

[Return to the first page](#)



- 64% of Black children have limited or no swimming ability. Drowning death rates for Black people are 1.5 times higher than the rates for white people. In swimming pools, Black children ages 10-14 years drown at rates 7.6 times higher than white children. Black children and youth are more likely to drown in public pools, and white children and youth are more likely to drown in residential pools.
- 45% of Latine children have limited or no swimming ability.
- Indigenous children are twice as likely to drown than their white counterparts. In natural water, American Indian or Alaska Native people have the highest drowning death rates, with rates 2.7 times higher than white people. Drowning death rates for American Indian or Alaska Native people ages 29 and younger are 2 times higher than the rates for white people, with the highest disparities among those ages 25-29 (rates 3.5 times higher).

Shared goals to prevent drownings:

- **Share information.** Let people know:
 - how critical it is to wear a life jacket;
 - how to properly fit a life jacket;
 - which Metro parks - and [other swimming areas/facilities](#) - have stations with life jackets they can borrow;
 - how to scope out safe areas to swim;
 - about the range of measures they can take to prevent drownings.
- **Connect people to resources.** Let people know when Metro is giving away life jackets and how people can access them.
- **Expand our reach.** By collaborating with each other, we have the potential to reach more people through various communications channels.

Content to share on social media

Videos

Below you will find downloadable videos from Metro's Dropbox to share with your communities, followed by a link to direct your audience to, if you prefer.

[Download videos in 16:9 \(horizontal\) and 9:16 \(vertical\) in Dropbox.](#)

[Return to the first page](#)



Photos

[Find downloadable photos in Dropbox.](#)

Sample captions

Cold water:

Did you know body heat can be lost four times faster in cold water than in cold air? When your body hits the water, you can experience cold shock—rapid breathing, a spike in heart rate and blood pressure. Be prepared. Wear a life jacket.

How to fit a life jacket:

The life jacket has to fit to do its job. Keep these tips in mind when selecting a jacket for you.

Life jackets come in many shapes, sizes, colors and materials. No matter which style you choose, it is very important that you choose one that's not too big, not too small, but just right. oregonmetro.gov/WaterSafety

When shopping for a life jacket, size matters. Rather than getting one to grow into, make sure the jacket fits snug on the user.

Drowning:

Drowning is a leading cause of preventable death for children in the United States.

Drowning is one of the top causes of death in children ages 1 to 4. More than 40% of drownings among children ages 5-14 happen in natural water. Nearly half of fatal drownings of people 15 years and older happen in lakes, rivers or oceans.

While younger children are more likely to drown in swimming pools, teens are more likely to drown in natural bodies of water like lakes, rivers and ponds. Why? Increased exposure to natural water settings, reduced supervision and a higher tendency for risk-taking behaviors.

Drowning is quick and quiet.

When a child begins to struggle, an instinctive drowning response kicks in.

[Return to the first page](#)



Rather than waving their arms, older children extend them to press down to try to lift their mouth above the water. Younger children remain with their face in the water with little to no movement in their arms and legs. Rather than yelling, children struggle to take in air. It can be less than 20 seconds before a child sinks below the surface. The best thing you and your loved ones can do before entering the water is wear a life jacket.

Racial/ethnic disparities

Drowning death rates for American Indian or Alaska Native people under the age of 30 are two times higher than the rates for white people.

Drowning death rates for Black people under age 30 are 1.5 times the rates for white people the same ages.

Disparities are highest among Black children. Children ages 5 to 9 are more than 2.5 times higher and children ages 10-14 are more than 3.5 times higher.

Safety tips:

Here are some things to keep in mind once children enter adolescence:

- Learn how to swim. It's never too late to learn basic swim and water survival skills.
- Continue to supervise. It can save lives. Knowing how to swim will not drown-proof any person at any age. Never swim alone. Use the buddy system, even when swimming with a large group of friends.
- Choose natural water swimming spots carefully. Swimming in a river or lake is very different from swimming in a pool. Be aware of the risks before you go.
- Wear a life jacket.

Lower your risk of drowning: learn to swim, bring a buddy, know the risks of natural water and plan your trip.

Buddy system: Friends do not let other friends swim alone. Use the buddy system, even when swimming with a large group of friends.

There's always a level of risk when swimming in a natural body of water.

[Return to the first page](#)



Talking points/additional messaging for community leaders/influencers to share

If your organization hosts group meetings, or you find yourself at community events, with people you serve, then please take a moment to share these messages. Include them in any updates you have to share or before a presentation begins. These messages are also fitting to include in copy for social media posts.

Key messages

- Wearing a life jacket, even if you know how to swim, is the best thing you can do to stay safe in the water.
- Wear a [life jacket](#) when boating or fishing, even if you don't intend to enter the water.
- It's important that a life jacket fits properly—check the label for height and weight requirements.
- Children who are Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latinx and/or Indigenous are more likely to drown than children who are white.
- Life jacket stations are available throughout Oxbow Regional Park, at the beach at Blue Lake Regional Park, Farmington Paddle Launch, Chinook Landing and Sauvie Island and M. James Gleason Memorial boat ramps.

Water safety for all ages

- Learn how to swim. It's never too late to learn basic swim and water survival skills. Swim lessons are hard to come by this summer, but some lessons might still be available in your area:
 - [Hillsboro](#)
 - [Oregon City](#)
 - [Portland](#)
 - [Tualatin](#)
- Teach children to always ask for permission to go near water.
- Continue to supervise around water, even once kids get older. It can save lives.
- Knowing how to swim will not drown-proof any person at any age.
- Drowning isn't just a risk to young kids. Many drowning victims are young adults, especially in open water.
- Never swim alone. Use the buddy system, even when swimming with a large group of friends.
- Avoid alcohol or drugs before or while swimming, diving or supervising swimmers.

[Return to the first page](#)



Water safety in rivers and lakes

- In Oregon, drowning deaths most often occur in warm months, frequently in water bodies fed by snowmelt like the Sandy River.
- Even seemingly calm rivers and lakes can be dangerous. Swimming in a river or lake is very different from swimming in a pool. Be aware of the risks before you go.
- Risks to prepare for in natural water bodies:
 - Sudden drop-offs can unexpectedly change water depth.
 - Cold water temperatures can cause cold shock.
 - Water quality issues. One main concern in rivers and lakes is harmful blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) that may be present in the summer. Check for healthy and safety updates for the location you plan to visit before you go.
 - Heed posted warning signs that alert of hazards (rocks, shallow areas) that may be easy to miss.
 - Fast moving currents.
 - No lifeguard on duty. Take note of where there is a lifeguard on duty at your chosen location. If there is no lifeguard, it is recommended that you swim with a buddy to maintain extra supervision.
 - Harsh weather conditions. Keep up to date on weather conditions. Strong winds can send debris into the water and cause strong currents.

For questions about this social media toolkit, contact Cristle Jose:

cristle.jose@oregonmetro.gov.