



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

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For Immediate Release

DROWNING RISK HIGH FOR CHILDREN UNDER FIVE AND NEW CANADIANS

Lifesaving Society Announces New Tools and Programs To Help Canadians Stay Safe This Summer

Toronto, ON – June 21, 2011 – While swimming is considered a quintessentially Canadian thing to do during the summer season, this time of year is statistically the most dangerous when it comes to water safety. The risk is higher, says the Lifesaving Society, a Canadian charitable organization working to prevent drowning, especially for children under five and new Canadians. Based on the findings of recent research and drowning reports, the Society wants to draw attention to these two groups, and is announcing new programs and tools to address some of their specific needs.

The Lifesaving Society's new *National Drowning Report* indicates a rise in drowning deaths in Canada in recent years. Until 2004, there was a long-term trend towards fewer drownings in the country. After reaching an all-time low of 433 water-related deaths in 2004, there was an upswing to 492 in 2005; 508 in 2006; and 480 in 2007. On average, this was more than a 10 per cent increase versus the previous three year average (from 2002-2004).

While final statistics on fatal drownings for 2008 to 2010 are not yet available from provincial and territorial chief coroners and medical examiners, interim data collected using media and Internet reports indicates that the trend continued in 2010. Reported drownings increased 10 per cent last year, compared to the number of deaths reported in 2009.

According to Barbara Byers, Public Education Director for the Lifesaving Society, of great concern is the spike in drownings in 2010 amongst children under five years of age, with 22 reported drownings in 2010 versus 14 in 2009.

"It's important that all Canadians be vigilant when they are in or around water, but when it comes to children we need to be extra careful," says Byers. "Drowning is the second leading cause of death among children, and the reality is that it can happen very quickly, in as little as 10 seconds. Parents and caregivers should always stay within sight and two feet of young children when near water. Anything further away than two feet is not 'within arms' reach' and it is simply not safe."

While basic swimming skills are critical to prevent drowning, the Society estimates that about half of Canadian children never take traditional swimming lessons. To address this, the Society continues to expand its "Swim to Survive" program, which teaches the essentials needed to survive an unexpected fall into deep water. Swim to Survive programs are available in most provinces. More than 400,000 children across the country have participated in the program.

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In Toronto, the Society has expanded its free Swim to Survive summer program to four new locations including Harbord CI, Downsview SS, Keele Public School and R.H. King Academy. The Province of Ontario is also investing to support the expansion of the Swim to Survive School Grant program, recently pledging \$2 million dollars.

New Canadians also at higher risk

Byers notes that new Canadians, especially those who have been in Canada for five years or less, also remain at a higher risk than those born in Canada. A study conducted last year by the Society showed that new Canadians are four times more likely to be unable to swim than those born here.

This year, the Lifesaving Society undertook new qualitative research to further explore the influence of ethnicity on attitudes and behaviours surrounding water safety. To provide insight into some of the key findings from the 2010 study, "The Influence of Ethnicity on Aquatic Participation and Drowning in Canada," the Society conducted focus groups with members of the Chinese, South Asian (Indian, Pakistani) and Muslim communities. The groups were made up of parents with at least one child under the age of 13, and who had re-located to Canada within the past five years. Participants offered personal stories and insights that supported many of the research findings.

"The most recent census reports that the proportion of Canada's population who were born outside the country reached its highest level in 75 years," says Byers. "Nearly 1 in 5 of us is foreign born. Our research study confirmed what we suspected about differences in knowledge and experiences around water safety, but speaking to new Canadian parents across the country was an important part of really understanding different perspectives and how to improve the way we educate all Canadians about water safety."

The focus group research undertaken this year supports the 2010 research findings and gives even more insight into the new Canadian experience when it comes to water safety.

"Over and over again, we heard from our focus group members that swimming was a very Canadian thing to do," says Byers. "Many said swimming pools and beaches were not easily accessible for them in their home country. They view Canada as being about the great outdoors and swimming is something they want for their children."

New Tool to address new Canadians

The Society is announcing the summer launch of a swimming survival video, which very clearly illustrates its three basic Swim to Survive skills (**ROLL** into deep water - **TREAD** water (1 min.) - **SWIM** 50 m), the minimum skills needed by all Canadians to survive a fall into deep water. The video will be available in eight languages including English, French, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, and Portuguese. The 3-minute video will be posted on YouTube. A 30-second PSA and a 1-minute version will be distributed to cable stations across the country for airing.

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“The video and PSA are but some of the many tools required to impact water safety and drowning prevention for a very vulnerable group of Canadians - those who are new to this country,” Byers says. The Stephanie Gaetz Keepsafe Foundation provided funding for the video.

The Lifesaving Society has also introduced many other initiatives for new Canadians:

- Swim to Survive lessons in most provinces – in many provinces it is free
- Swim to Survive lessons during school time – in Ontario for all Grade 3 students
- Female-only lessons in many major cities including Toronto
- Swim to Survive handout in 26 languages

Water safety is a priority for all Canadians

The Lifesaving Society continues to remind all Canadians to:

- Take a lifesaving course and learn how to reduce the risk of drowning, as well as what to do if something does go wrong. At a minimum, make sure everyone in your family can achieve the Canadian “Swim to Survive” standard.
- Always wear a lifejacket or personal flotation device (PFD) when boating.
- Don't drink and drive your boat.
- Always closely supervise children; keep them within arms' reach and, whenever possible, choose to swim in an area supervised by a lifeguard.

About the study

In May 2010, the Lifesaving Society commissioned an Ipsos Reid Public Affairs Study called “The Influence of Ethnicity on Aquatic Participation and Drowning in Canada,” to help understand the attitudes and behaviours of new Canadians towards swimming, and their knowledge of water safety practices. The study focused on a population of respondents born in Canada and a population of respondents from the Chinese, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Muslim communities not born in Canada. Countries within these regions have been identified by Citizenship and Immigration Canada as the top source countries for newcomers to Canada.

Several issues around water safety were investigated, including:

- Likelihood of participation in swimming and other water activities.
- Correlation between the length of time a person is settled in Canada and their knowledge, attitudes and experiences around water safety.
- Effectiveness of certain water safety education programming and programs including in-language materials as a way of reaching out to groups of new Canadians.

The total sample was 1032 Canadian residents between the ages of 18 and 60. Of the total respondents, 433 were born in Canada and 599 were not born in Canada. They are referred to as ‘new Canadians’ throughout the report. (Results of a probability study with a sample size of 433 are considered accurate within +/- 4.66 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Results of a probability study with a sample size of 599 are considered accurate within 3.94 percentage points, 19 times out of 20).

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About the Focus Groups

During the month of April, 2011, six, two-hour focus groups were conducted by Heads Up Research, a Canadian qualitative research services firm. Ontario Power Generation was a co-sponsor of the study. The focus groups took place in Vancouver and Toronto and participants were screened for the following criteria:

- New to Canada within the past 5 years
- Have at least one child under 13 years of age
- Mostly parents who know how to swim
- Mixed views on a number of water safety issues

Focus groups were conducted in Mandarin and English and included three groups among the Chinese community (one group of Chinese dads and two groups of Chinese moms) and three groups among the South Asian community (one group of Muslim dads from Pakistan, one group of Muslim moms from Pakistan; one group of Hindu moms from India).

About Swim to Survive

The Swim to Survive program 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 metres (statistics show that most people who drown are less than 15 metres 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.

The Stephanie Gaetz Keepsafe Foundation, a charitable foundation founded by Barbara Underhill and Rick Gaetz, is the founding sponsor of the Swim to Survive program. The Foundation promotes safety education and injury prevention among children and was a sponsor of the Swim to Survive video.

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 in Canada, more than 800,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguard, first aid and leadership programs. For more information, please visit www.lifesavingsociety.com.

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

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