



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

For Immediate Release

WHO report: drowning among top causes of death for children worldwide
Programs like Lifesaving Society's 'Swim to Survive'
could have immunization-like benefit

Toronto, ON – June 4, 2015 – The World Health Organization (WHO) has released its first-ever global report dedicated exclusively to drowning - *Global report on drowning: preventing a leading killer*. The report covers drowning in all countries of the world, across all ages. Among the findings: drowning is one of the ten leading causes of death for children and young people in every region.

In Canada, the Lifesaving Society - the lead organization responsible for drowning prevention - notes that it's the second leading cause of preventable death for children under the age of 10.

Swimming lessons are like an immunization against drowning

Teaching school-age children basic swimming, water safety and safe rescue skills is one of the *Ten Actions to Prevent Drowning* specifically identified by the WHO report.

“Teaching young children basic survival swimming skills can have a life-long immunization effect against drowning,” says Dr. Stephen Beerman, a Canadian doctor and researcher who contributed to the report. “The Lifesaving Society’s Swim to Survive program is an excellent example of how an organized, community-based approach can have an impact on generations of children. The program is a great model for other countries in the world.”

In 2005, the Lifesaving Society developed *Swim to Survive*, a school-based program that teaches grade three students three critical skills needed to survive an unexpected fall into water.

The program resulted from the Lifesaving Society’s vision that every child in Canada should learn basic survival swimming skills. In a country blessed with so much water, swimming skills are essential.

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97% of Canadians agree that swimming is a life skill every child should learn

“Spending time in and around water is a fact of life in Canada, and every child deserves the chance to learn basic swimming skills,” says Barbara Byers, Public Education Director of the Lifesaving Society. “Acquiring these basic skills is a fundamental requirement in any meaningful attempt to eliminate drowning in Canada. Our goal is to reach every grade three student and arm them with the skills to help keep themselves safe. We are proud of the success of the Swim to Survive program, we are working towards expanding the program across Canada.”

A recent Angus Reid Forum survey conducted for the Society found that 97% of Canadians agree swimming is a life skill that every child should learn, and 88% agreed that all children should receive swimming instruction as part of a school safety program.

Drowning is preventable

Globally, an estimated 372,000 people drown each year in what the WHO describes as a serious but neglected public health threat. While the impact from drowning is significant compared to other public health challenges, the report notes there are no broad, organized global strategies for prevention.

The WHO report calls for both global and local communities to work together to introduce strategies aimed at promoting water safety and drowning prevention. Its *Ten Actions to Prevent Drowning* include community-based actions, areas for policy and legislation, and research priorities.

The Lifesaving Society actively supports the strategies recommended in the WHO report including data collection and research; promoting prevention strategies such as four-sided fencing; and drowning prevention education programs that teach swimming skills to children.

Swim to Survive celebrates 10 years

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the launch of the Swim to Survive program, which teaches three basic skills in sequence: roll into deep water, tread water for 1 minute, and swim 50 metres.

Funding for the development of the program was made possible by a grant from the Stephanie Gaetz Keepsafe Foundation. In its inaugural year, with funding from the York regional government, approximately 3,000 grade 3 students from across Ontario’s York region participated in the pilot program.

In 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education gave the Lifesaving Society close to \$1 million dollars to fund a province-wide school grant program. The Ministry has continued to support the program each year since then. Currently, the program is funded by the Ministry and many other government and community partners.

This funding has enabled almost 670,000 children from 50 school boards, across 93 municipalities in Ontario to participate in the Swim to Survive program. The program continues to grow and is now available in all provinces across Canada.

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, more than 1,000,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguarding and leadership programs. For more information, please visit www.lifesavingsociety.com

About the *Global report on drowning: preventing a leading killer*

The Global report on drowning is the first World Health Organization report dedicated exclusively to drowning – a highly preventable public health challenge that has never been targeted by a global strategic prevention effort. This report aims to change this. It sets out current knowledge about drowning and drowning prevention, and calls for a substantial scaling up of comprehensive efforts and resources to reduce what is an intolerable death toll, particularly among children and adolescents.

For more information:

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/drowning_global_report/Final_report_full_web.pdf?ua=1

About the Stephanie Gaetz Keepsafe Foundation

Preventable injuries are the leading cause of death among Canadian children, more than all other causes combined. The Stephanie Gaetz Keepsafe Foundation is a charitable foundation founded by Barbara Underhill and Rick Gaetz to promote safety education and injury prevention. The Foundation works with injury prevention professionals to support and fund safety programs for children in schools and communities across Canada.

The Stephanie Gaetz Keepsafe Foundation is the founding sponsor of the Swim to Survive and Swim to Survive+ programs. For more information, visit www.keepsafefoundation.ca

About the Angus Reid Forum

From April 22nd to May 6th, 2015 an online survey was conducted among 2,511 randomly selected Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum panelists. The margin of error—which measures sampling variability—is +/- 2.0%, 19 times out of 20. The results have been statistically weighted according to education, age, gender and region (and in Quebec, language) Census data to ensure a sample representative of the entire adult population of Canada. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

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

Stephanie Kovacs
Praxis PR
905-949-8255 ext. 244
905-929-7557 (cell)
stephanie@praxispr.ca

Nichola Rochon
Praxis PR
905-949-8255 ext. 227
416-460-3159 (cell)
nichola@praxispr.ca

Barbara Byers
The Lifesaving Society
416-490-8844
416-727-5636 (cell)
barbarab@lifeguarding.com