



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

For Immediate Release

STUDY REVEALS NEW CANADIANS AT HIGHER RISK FOR DROWNING

*Results released for drowning prevention week show
new Canadians are four times more likely to be unable to swim*

Toronto, ON – July 15, 2010 – Results from a new study commissioned by the Lifesaving Society, a charitable organization working to prevent drowning, show that ‘new Canadians’ – particularly those who have been living in Canada for less than five years – are at higher risk for drowning when boating and swimming. In fact, despite plans by 79 per cent of new Canadians to be in and around water this summer, they are four times more likely to be unable to swim than those born in Canada.

Initial findings from the study “The Influence of Ethnicity on Aquatic Participation and Drowning in Canada” were announced today in advance of annual National Drowning Prevention Week, taking place from July 17 to 24. Thought to be the first of its kind in Canada, the study examines the influence of ethnicity on attitudes and behaviours surrounding water safety. The Lifesaving Society plans to release a number of reports on the results from the study and hopes this will mark the beginning of more in-depth research to help strengthen educational outreach to all Canadians.

“The results of the study confirm what we have observed in communities across the country: newcomers to Canada often have different knowledge or experiences around issues of water safety,” says Barbara Byers, Public Education Director for the Lifesaving Society. “We commissioned this study to help us better understand what those differences are and how we can improve the way we educate all Canadians about water safety.”

“The results point to the need for water safety education targeted to reach new immigrants, especially those who have been living in Canada for less than five years,” Byers continued. “Boating and swimming in particular, are two important areas where study results show new Canadians need more information and education to reduce their risk of drowning.”

Swimming is the most popular water activity, yet almost a third (31%) of new Canadians are nervous around water and half (50%) of new Canadian parents fear their children may drown.

The study revealed that 57 per cent of new Canadians surveyed identified swimming as the water activity they participate in most often. This highlights the need for the Lifesaving Society to teach the importance of being able to swim and the benefits of formal swimming lessons to new Canadians. Other results include:

- New Canadians (19 per cent) are over four times more likely to be unable to swim than those born in Canada (4 per cent).
- Half (50 per cent) of new Canadian parents worry that their children might drown or become injured when swimming.

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Learning to swim a priority

Ninety-two per cent of new Canadians surveyed believe that learning to swim is a necessary life skill and 93 per cent agree that all children should receive swimming instruction at school as part of a school safety program. Byers says these results point to the need to continue offering programs like 'Swim to Survive.' Through elementary schools, it teaches children the minimum standard of swimming ability for survival after an unexpected fall into the water. After a successful launch in Ontario in 2005, the program is now offered in all provinces except Prince Edward Island.

"We're encouraged to see new Canadians recognize the need for formal lessons and water safety education," says Byers. "We have had a significant effect on educating children with lifesaving swimming skills over the past several years with 'Swim to Survive.' But it's important to remember that drowning remains one of the leading causes of death among children, and our efforts must continue until that is no longer the case."

Boating results indicate plans to participate, but hesitation about safety:

- 31 per cent of new Canadians plan to participate in boating activities this summer
- 42 per cent of new Canadians who participate in boating report they are nervous about being in a boat on the water
- 60 per cent of new Canadians who participate in boating activities don't consider themselves knowledgeable about boating safety

Multi-language outreach to new Canadians

The Lifesaving Society recognizes that many new Canadians face language barriers when it comes to receiving information and is currently working to provide communication tools concerning boating safety to members of communities where English is a second language.

In June 2010, in partnership with the Ontario Power Generation (OPG), the Society released boating safety tips in 33 languages including First Nations languages.

In 2009, the Society partnered with RBC Foundation to translate information about Swim to Survive into 26 additional languages (in addition to English and French): Arabic; Chinese; Czech; Farsi; Greek; Gujarati; Hindi; Hungarian; Italian; Khmer; Korean; Macedonian; Pashto; Polish; Portuguese; Punjabi; Romanian; Russian; Somali; Spanish; Tagalog; Tamil; Twi; Ukrainian; Urdu and Vietnamese.

The recent study shows these translated tools are a step in the right direction. When presented with a Swim to Survive educational poster produced in their native language, 85 per cent of new Canadians agreed they learned something helpful from the poster that they didn't know before. Ninety-one per cent agreed the posters will encourage more people to learn to swim now that they are available in many languages.

Foreign-born population on the rise

Statistics Canada projects that the proportion of the Canadian population consisting of foreign-born persons will continue to rise, and could reach as high as between 25 per cent and 28 per cent in 2031. That means at least one in four people living in Canada could be foreign born.¹

“Without question, learning to swim is important for all Canadians,” Byers says. “However, as the population continues to change in Canada, we need to make sure that we are doing our best to make our education and water safety prevention tools available to everyone.”

As part of their outreach during National Drowning Prevention Week, The Lifesaving Society also reminds 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.

National Drowning Statistics

Drowning deaths have continued to increase in recent years. In 2006, the most recent year that statistics are available, 508 Canadians died in water-related incidents. The highest increase in drowning was among males aged 50-64. Men are also four more likely to drown than women.

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.²

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).

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.

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, water-incident research, aquatic safety management and lifesaving sport. Each year in Canada, more than 700,000 Canadians participate in the Society's swimming, lifesaving, lifeguarding, 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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References

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2. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Facts and Figures 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001: Immigration Overview.