

Safe Water for Safe Kids

By

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Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children under 14 years in age in the United States. From 2000-2003, there were two drowning deaths and 16 hospitalizations among children ages 14 and under in Sonoma County. In an effort to promote water safety, especially in the Latino community, the Sonoma County Water Safety Committee, led by the American Red Cross- Sonoma County Chapter and the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department, is partnering with Safe Kids Sonoma County. The week of May 6 -13, 2006, is National Safe Kids Week and the theme this year is "Safe Water for Safe Kids."

Residents and visitors to Sonoma County are fortunate to have so many beautiful beaches, rivers, lakes, and other types of aquatic recreation to enjoy, but there are hidden dangers and we all must be cautious around water. Among young adults, Latinos account for a disproportionately high number of drownings along the Russian River. To address this problem, the Red Cross of Sonoma County will continue its third summer of the "Vamos a Nadar" (Let's Go Swimming) program with the goal of providing Latino children with their first instructional swim lesson, and parents with a one-day water safety class.

On May 6, 2006, the first of four "Vamos a Nadar" classes will be held at the Finley Swim Center in Santa Rosa. The "Vamos a Nadar" program is free of charge and will be offered in Cloverdale, Petaluma, Sebastopol, and Santa Rosa. Participation in the program also includes coupons for \$15 swim lessons at pools around the county (regular price is approximately \$40 to \$60). Registration for the free classes is required and space is limited. Call the American Red Cross – Sonoma County Chapter at 577-7611 to register.

Some tips to stay safe around the water:

- **Learn to swim.** It is never too late to learn. Never swim alone.
- **Wear a properly fitted lifejacket.** Kids- and adults- who are not strong swimmers should use a personal flotation device (PFD) approved by the U.S. Coast Guard when they are in or around water. Never rely on inflatable toys. Everyone, including strong swimmers, should wear a PFD when boating.
- **Keep basic lifesaving equipment by the pool; know where it is and how to use it.** A first aid kit, cell phone, phone list with emergency numbers, reaching pole, and ring buoy with a line attached are recommended.
- **Pack a "safety bag" for a day at the ocean or river.** Water-proof sunscreen with an SPF 15 or higher, water shoes to keep feet safe from the heat and sharp objects, and plenty of drinking water are a must. All containers should be plastic to prevent injuries from breaking glass. Also a hat and sunglasses keep eyes safe from dangerous UV rays.
- **Don't mix alcohol and swimming.** Many of the drowning deaths that have occurred in the Russian River have been linked to the use of alcohol, especially among Latino males. Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination, affects your swimming and diving skills and reduces your body's ability to stay warm. Stay OUT of the water if you drink.
- **Swim in supervised areas only.**
- **Don't dive- save your neck.**

- **Watch out for the “dangerous too’s.”** Take a break at the point of being too tired, too cold, or too far from safety, too much sun, too little hydration, or too much strenuous activity.
- **Pay attention to local water conditions and forecasts.** Stop swimming at the first indication of bad weather.
- **Learn Red Cross first aid and CPR.** It is important to know what to do if a situation arises. All caregivers, including grandparents, older siblings, and babysitters should have these lifesaving skills. Call 577-7611 for information.

In Sonoma County:

- **If you go to the Russian River...**
 - Take caution especially early in the season (May and June) when the river is running higher and colder (especially this year due to the floods)
 - Be aware even when wading. The river has ledges that drop off quickly.
 - Be prepared for the current. Although the river may look calm, you cannot see what is below.
 - Swim near a lifeguard. The following beaches have lifeguards on duty: Veterans Memorial Beach-Healdsburg, Johnson’s Beach- Guerneville, & Monte Rio.
- **If you visit the beach...**
 - Never turn your back on the ocean or get too close to breaking waves. Northern California beaches have rip currents and sleeper waves that can seem to come out of nowhere.
 - Be prepared for the cold temperature of the water.
 - Keep your pets on a leash (it’s the law), and never try and rescue your pet from the ocean.