



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

NICK LYON
DIRECTOR

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CONTACT: Lynn Sutfin
517-241-2112
SutfinL1@michigan.gov

May is Water Safety Month - learn to be water aware

LANSING, Mich. – On average, 78 people die each year in drowning incidents in the Great Lakes. While Michiganders are encouraged to visit and enjoy all the state's beaches have to offer, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is urging everyone to learn about safe swimming and the signs of dangerous currents as part of Water Safety Month.

Dangerous currents develop when winds blow toward the shore, and waves are three feet or higher. The Great Lakes produce several types of currents, all of which should be avoided by swimmers and anyone going near the water, including the rip current.

A rip current is a powerful, narrow channel of fast-moving water moving away from the shore. If you find yourself in a rip current do not fight it. Flip on your back and float to conserve energy. Then follow the safest path out of the water – often parallel to the shore – swimming back to land at an angle.

“Swimming is a popular summer activity and Michigan has more than 10,000 inland lakes in addition to the Great Lakes for residents to enjoy,” said Nick Lyon, MDHHS director. “Be sure to be aware of conditions before entering the water and follow safe swimming practices.”

MDHHS encourages all residents to follow these water safety tips:

- Learn to swim and how to be safe in and around the water.
- Never go swimming alone, and designate someone to watch people who are in the water.
- Watch for dangerous waves and signs of rip currents (water that is discolored and choppy, foamy or filled with debris and moving in a channel away from shore).
- Follow beach hazard statements and avoid the water when conditions are not safe for swimming.
- Do not swim near piers or break walls.
- Always wear a lifejacket – even experienced swimmers can easily get overcome by dangerous currents.

To learn more about safe swimming practices, visit Nationalwatersafetymonth.org. To check Great Lakes beach hazards, visit Weather.gov/greatlakes/beachhazards.

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