



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR

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DIRECTOR

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Hawai'i observes Beach Safety Week Aug. 22-28

HONOLULU – Gov. David Ige has proclaimed Aug. 22 – 28 Hawai'i Beach Safety Week. Highlights of the week will include City and County of Honolulu lifeguard rescue demonstrations in Waikiki, ocean-related spinal cord injury testimony from a survivor on the Island of Hawai'i, and public rescue tube briefings with Maui lifeguards at Kahului Airport. Due to COVID-19 safety measures, the annual Ocean Safety Conference and Jr. Lifeguard Championships have been cancelled.

According to the Hawai'i Department of Health, ocean drowning is the leading cause of fatal injuries for Hawai'i visitors and the sixth leading cause for residents. From 2015-2019, Hawai'i averaged 80 deaths per year from ocean drowning. Visitors comprised a slight majority (57%, 45 deaths). The annual total fell to 52 fatal ocean drownings after Hawai'i shut down in 2020 due to COVID-19. This included 15 visitors. As of June 2021, there have been 27 fatal ocean drownings. On average, one visitor dies by drowning every week in Hawai'i. More visitors drowned while snorkeling than nearly all other ocean activities combined. Ocean-related activities are the second most common cause of spinal cord injuries in Hawai'i. Most occur in visitors (83%).

This year the Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention Advisory Committee collaborated with the annual Duke's Oceanfest, which celebrates Duke Kahanamoku's life of excellence. The Olympian once used his surfboard to help rescue victims of a capsized ship in Newport Beach. This led to lifeguards across the United States to begin using surfboards as standard equipment for water rescues.

"With the return of visitors and more residents going to the beach lifeguards and ocean safety professionals have never been more relevant," said John Titchen, Chief of Ocean Safety for the City and County of Honolulu and Drowning Advisory Committee member. "On all islands, lifeguards are needed more than ever. From swimmers to surfers to stand-up paddlers to kayakers to foilers to fishers to bodysurfers, and everything in between, it's busy out there."

The Hawai'i Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention Advisory Committee is coordinated by the Department of Health, Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention System Branch. The Advisory Committee brings together organizations from all four counties, as well as state and non-profit groups.

Hawaii Beach Safety Week 2021 activities include:

- **Monday, Aug. 23** - Waikiki: Near-shore rescue demonstrations by City and County of Honolulu lifeguards; contact Chief John Titchen at (808) 273-7862.
- **Tuesday, Aug. 24** - Kahului Airport: Tips on Public Rescue Tube Use by Maui Ocean Safety; contact Chief Jeff Giese at (808) 463-3850.
- **Wednesday Aug. 25** - Update and insights from a firefighter who suffered a spinal cord injury while bodysurfing at Sandy Beach on O'ahu; contact Chelsea Ko at (808) 733-2148.
- **Thursday, Aug. 26** - Outreach to Hawai'i Island keiki on ocean safety basics: Hawai'i Ocean Safety; contact Chief Darwin Okinaka at (808) 557-4209.
- **Friday, Aug. 27**- Rescue craft and response operations training with Kaua'i Ocean Safety Bureau and Kaua'i Fire Department; contact Kalani Vierra at (808) 241-4964.

For more information on the Advisory Committee or drowning prevention efforts statewide, please contact Bridget Velasco at bridget.velasco@doh.hawaii.gov.

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