



STATE OF HAWAI'I
KA MOKU 'ĀINA O HAWAI'I

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

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DOH RAISES AWARENESS FOR HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY DAY ON MAY 15

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HONOLULU — May 15, 2025 is Hawai'i Water Safety Day, and the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH), in partnership with the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition and the YMCA, is encouraging the community to help raise awareness about water safety and drowning. Hawai'i Water Safety Day was established last year when Hawai'i Governor Josh Green, M.D., signed Senate Bill 2841 into law.

DOH data indicates:

- Hawai'i's resident drowning rate is the highest in the nation.
- Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related deaths for tourists.
- Drowning is the No. 1 cause of death for children in Hawai'i ages 1-15.
- Less than 2% of Hawai'i's second graders have the basic skills to avoid or recover from drowning.

- Almost all (88%) of fatal drowning victims ages 1-15 in Hawai'i were residents; most (64%) drowned in swimming pools. These proportions were significantly lower, 52% and 8% respectively, for victims of older ages.

In response to this data, the DOH Emergency Medical Services & Injury Prevention System Branch (EMSIPSB) is developing a statewide child drowning prevention initiative with the goal of reducing or eliminating fatal and nonfatal child drownings in Hawai'i. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), nonfatal drowning happens when a person survives a drowning incident. The child drowning prevention initiative will include public safety messaging and plans to increase access to water safety and swim lessons via the YMCA and other organizations, with an emphasis on reaching low-income families.

"Every year in Hawai'i we lose young children to fatal drownings, and we see many more in our trauma centers and emergency departments," said Garrett D. Hall, the state trauma program manager and DOH EMSIPSB acting branch chief. "Some children suffer long-term health effects such as brain damage. Toddlers are especially at risk as are children with health conditions. However, drownings are preventable, and our goal is to protect children from drowning in Hawai'i. We are very fortunate to have Governor Green and state legislators support with this initiative to make a difference and improve community health and safety for our keiki across the islands."

The department is partnering with the YMCA on its "Phones Down, Eyes Up™" campaign that encourages parents and caregivers to designate a "water watcher" — "an adult who stays focused and free from distractions like phones, conversations, or alcohol who can maintain constant visual contact with all children in or near the water."

The public can help protect their loved ones in various ways:

- Designate a "water watcher" during swimming activities and during pool or beach parties.
- Families with pools should install barriers, including four-sided fencing with latching gates and alarms on windows, doors, gates and in pools.
- Empty wading pools after every use.
- Parents and caregivers should learn CPR in case of an emergency. The American Red Cross offers a free [online class](#) on Water Safety for Parents and Caregivers as well as fee-based CPR classes.
- Enroll children in swim lessons that include water safety skills. Lessons can reduce the risk of drowning by 88% and should be combined with other protective factors.
- Go to lifeguarded beaches and pay attention to signs and ocean conditions.
- Wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved Personal Flotation Devices (PFD) while aboard a vessel operating or anchored offshore, including on SUPs and kayaks. PFDs are required for children 12 years and under.

The DOH also contributed to the publication of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition's 2025 [Hawai'i Water Safety Plan](#): I Palekana Kakou Ma Ka Wai (Let Us Be Safe in the Water), "a roadmap to ensure that everyone in Hawai'i is safe in, on, or around the water."

The plan incorporates guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Inspired by the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan, Hawai'i's plan has specific action recommendations that address the state's unique

ocean and aquatic environments and the cultural, social and economic factors that affect the state's drowning numbers.

The coalition will be hosting a meeting to discuss the plan on May 16 from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. in Waikīkī. Registration is required, and there is an admission fee of \$25. Register for the meeting [here](#).

For more information, visit the following sites:

[Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition](#)

[DOH EMS IPSB Drowning Prevention Information](#)

[CDC Drowning Prevention Information](#)

[United States National Water Safety Action Plan](#)

[WHO Drowning Fact Sheet](#)

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