



King County

May 15, 2026

Dear King County Families,

Welcome to summer 2026! As your children get ready for summer break, please remember that water activities come with risks. Since 2018, King County has seen a rise in preventable drowning fatalities, with preliminary data showing 25 lives lost in 2025. Many of these tragedies could have been avoided with proper supervision and life jacket use.

This summer, let's make water safety a priority! **The King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, King County Sheriff's Office, Public Health – Seattle & King County, and King County Department of Local Services** recommend the following tips:

Water Safety Tips

- **Wear a life jacket.** Use a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)-approved life jacket when swimming or boating. Look for the label as non-approved life jackets are often available through popular online retailers. [Learn to choose the right life jacket here.](#)
- **Be extra cautious when recreating in rivers and lakes** – they are fed by mountain run-off and stay dangerously cold all summer. Jumping into cold water can lead to muscle failure and shock within seconds or minutes, even for strong swimmers.
- **Learn to swim and self-rescue.** Free and low-cost swim lessons are available in Seattle and throughout King County for children and adults. Visit [Swim Seattle](#), [No More Under](#), and the [YMCA](#).
- **Supervise children near water** at all times. Remain within “touch distance,” appoint a dedicated “water watcher” and rotate the role every 20 minutes to prevent distraction. Phone down, eyes up! [Download a free Water Watcher Card.](#)
- **Avoid alcohol, cannabis, or other impairing drugs** while swimming, boating, or supervising children.
- **Obey all safety signs** and closures. [Check beach conditions](#) before you go.
- **Learn CPR.** Visit [kingcounty.gov/cpr](#) for training information on Hands-Only CPR.

Open Water and Boating Safety Tips – Especially for 2026!

In December 2025, floods across Washington drastically changed the landscape of our rivers. Rivers may appear calm but have strong hidden currents, new root balls, log jams, and boulders. If you choose to recreate in our rivers and lakes, we advise:

- **Always wear a life jacket**, even if you have been there before. There may be new and unexpected hazards due to the flooding. And remember, life jackets are mandatory for children under 12 on vessels under 19 feet.
- **Don't boat or recreate in the water alone.** Boating and swimming in open water is better with a buddy and life jackets!
- **Inform someone of your recreation plans**, including when and where you expect to launch and return.
- **Bring a dry bag with food, water**, and warm clothes.
- **Always bring an oar** on your vessel for rescues – and remember, **if someone is in trouble, REACH, THROW, DON'T GO!**
- **Choose safer swimming options**, such as a lifeguarded public beach or pool.

Resources:

- Water safety tips: [King County Water Safety.](#)
- Lifeguard schedules, swim lessons, and life jacket stations: [King County Area Public Lifeguarded Beaches and Summer Outdoor Pools.](#)
- Find life jacket loaner stations: [“Washington State Parks Life Jacket Loaner Map.”](#)
- Get 20% off life jackets in stock at Big 5 Sporting Goods via [Seattle Children's Drowning Prevention Network.](#)

Have a safe and enjoyable summer.

Sincerely,

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