

NYS Water & Ice Safety:

A Year-Round Survival Guide



The Buddy System & Active Supervision:

Never swim alone; always have a "Water Buddy" and a designated adult "Water Watcher" who is not distracted by phones or books.



Wear Your Life Jacket (PFD):

Ensure your life jacket is U.S. Coast Guard-approved, properly fitted, and snug; air-filled swimming aids like "water wings" are not safe substitutes.

Know the Environment:

Swimming in lakes or rivers is different than pools; be aware of unpredictable currents, underwater debris, and "Rip Currents" (swim parallel to shore to escape them).



Look Before You Leap:

Only swim where there is a lifeguard present and never dive into water less than 8 feet deep or of unknown depth.

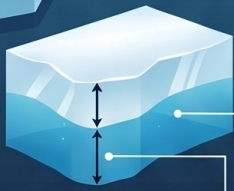


Summer

Winter

Thick and Blue, Tried and True; White and Crispy, Way Too Risky!:

Use this slogan to remember that clear blue ice is the strongest, while white "snow ice" is significantly weaker.



The 4-Inch Rule

Never go on the ice unless an adult checks it first; it must be at least four inches of clear, blue ice to walk on.

Manage the "Cold Shock"

Falling into water below 70°F causes an involuntary gasp reflex, stay calm and focus on keeping your head above water for the 1-3 minutes it takes for breathing to level out.

Double the Thickness for White Ice

Opaque white ice is 50% weaker than clear ice; if the ice is white, it must be at least eight inches thick to be considered safe.

Cold Water Survival & Emergencies



Reach or Throw, Don't Go!

If someone falls in, do not jump in after them; instead, "Preach" (give instructions), "Reach" (use a branch or rope), or "Throw" (toss a float).

Stay Away from "Bubblers"

De-icing systems near docks create thin ice or open water for significant distances, even in sub-zero temperatures.



Self-Rescue: Kick, Pull, and Roll

If you fall through ice, turn back to where you came from, kick your legs until horizontal, swim onto the ice, and roll away from the hole to spread your weight.



The 10-Minute Limit

You lose body heat 25 times faster in water than air; if you cannot get out within 10 minutes, stop struggling to save energy and wait for rescue.

Parent & Administrator Checklist



Layers of Protection

Ensure home pools have four-sided fencing at least 4 feet high with self-closing, self-latching gates.



Dress for the Conditions

Wear moisture-wicking base layers and wool/fleece insulators; avoid cotton, which holds moisture and increases hypothermia risk.



2026 Educational Mandate

Per NY5 Education Law § 825 and Commissioner's Regulation 8 NYCRR §107.1, districts should provide water safety instruction and disclosure of local low-cost swimming options.

Regional Resources (Madison/Oneida County Area)

Local organizations providing swimming instruction and financial assistance.

Organization	Location / Contact	Assistance Offered
YMCA of the Greater TH-Valley	Oneida: (315) 363-7798 / Rome: (318) 336-3500	"Changing Lives" Sliding-fee scale
YMCA of Central New York	Northwest & East Area Branches	Donor-supported group swim lessons
Oneida County Youth Bureau	(315) 798-5027	Program access for youth under 21
Hamilton College	Clinton, NY: (315) 869-4271	Summer swimming camps