

Experts look to cut drowning deaths

By **MICHAEL OLLOVE**
Stataline.org

WASHINGTON — Accidental drowning is the second leading cause of death, after birth defects, for U.S. children younger than age 5.

For youngsters younger than 15, only traffic accidents are responsible for more deaths by injury, and while drowning rates have declined slightly since the turn of the century, African-Americans continue to die from drowning at considerably higher rates than whites.

Faced with such stubborn figures, public health advocates and researchers complain that state and local governments aren't doing enough to prevent drowning deaths.

Critics say most states don't have sufficient laws or don't enforce laws that could lessen the chances of drowning, such as requirements for fencing around private pools and the presence of trained lifeguards. Too little is being done to make sure that children have swim lessons and water safety skills, they say.

"There is so much that can and should be done," said Andrea Gielen, director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Injury Research and Policy.

The Minnesota Legislature is studying a proposal that would require that all public school students be given access to free swim lessons. But no other states appear to be taking that approach.

The U.S. Virgin Islands has a requirement, but it has never fully implemented it.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 3,391 people died by accidental drowning in the United States in 2013, about the norm in the years since 2000. Of the 2013 drownings, 625 were children under 15.

Injury and swimming experts such as the Red Cross say the best way to reduce the risk of drowning is by making sure that people know how to swim, although exactly how that can be accomplished for all is elusive.

However, Washington has taken several other steps that, experts say, may help reduce the risk of drowning and it is a model for other states, according to advocates.

The state, which has more drownings in lakes, rivers and ocean water than in pools, requires that all children under 13 wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life preserver in any boat that isn't anchored and is less than 19 feet in length. The law also requires

that all water skiers wear life jackets.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, of the 418 reported boating-related drownings in the U.S. last year, at least 80 percent involved people who were not wearing life jackets.

Another element in the state's anti-drowning policies is a requirement that all public pools have a lifeguard on duty during operating hours. However, the requirement does not extend to public beaches.

The American Academy of Pediatrics used to recommend against swimming lessons for children under 4. Weiss said the policy stemmed from concerns that parents and other adults would relax their supervision of young children if they had learned to swim.

But the thinking changed after the publication of a 2009 study showing that swimming competency was one of the best ways of reducing drowning, Weiss said. As a result, he said, the group changed its policies to remove objections to lessons for children as young as 1. The rate of drowning deaths for 1 to 4 year olds dropped from 3.68 per 100,000 in 2010 to 2.95 after the revision, said Weiss, one of the authors of the new policy.

The drowning rate among young African-Americans is 5.5 times that of whites, according to the CDC.

Cleanup/Block Party set for Garden Street

E's Garden Teahouse and Things and the Long/Path Garden Street Community Association, in collaboration with the Economic Development Authority's Enterprise and Commercial Zone Commission, will host a Cleanup/Block Party on Garden Street on St. Thomas on Saturday.

Residents and business owners of Garden Street and the general public are invited to participate in the cleanup, a walk through the historic neighborhood and a block party.

The Cleanup/Block Party is one of a number of ongoing initiatives designed to help revitalize the neighborhood of Garden Street, which is one of four enterprise zones in the territory.

The cleanup will be from 9 a.m. to noon, followed by a walk through the historic neighborhood from noon to 2 p.m.

The block party will be from 2 to 8

p.m. on Commandant Gade and feature musical entertainment, games and activities for children. Food and drink also will be on sale.

Volunteers for the cleanup will assemble at the Long Path/Garden Street Community Center and partici-

pants of the historic walk will meet at E's Garden Teahouse and Things on Commandant Gade, at the bottom of Bunker Hill.

To volunteer or submit donations, contact Judith Edwin at E's Garden Teahouse and Things at **776-2577**.

Cruise Ships

Today, Sept. 4 to Sunday, Sept. 6

No ships

Monday, Sept. 7

Carnival Liberty (2,974) 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Havensight

Tuesday, Sept. 8

Norwegian Getaway (3,969) 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Havensight

Carnival Glory (2,974) 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Havensight

Oasis of the Seas (5,488) 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Crown Bay

Wednesday, Sept. 9

Freedom of the Seas (3,634) 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Havensight

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