

Alysia Yeager, American Red Cross
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Summer is finally here! The weather is warming up, the kids are out of school and those family vacations are kicking into high gear.

As you plan your fun in the sun this summer, the Steele County Community Awareness Emergency Response (CAER) and the American Red Cross want you to remember a few simple water safety rules that may just save a life this summer.

Never swim alone. You should always try and swim in areas where there is a certified lifeguard on duty, but if you are in an unsupervised area, always swim with a buddy, so there is always someone present to assist or go for help in case of an emergency.

Dive with caution. You should only dive into areas that you know are safe, like the deep end of the swimming pool. Never enter the water head first if you are unfamiliar with the area you are in. Even when entering the water feet first, you should check the water for rocks or other obstructions that can cause permanent spinal cord damage, paralysis and death.

Open water swimming is more challenging than swimming in a pool. Remember that swimming in any open body of water (rivers, lakes and oceans) takes more energy than swimming in a pool because you will need to fight the current. If you do find yourself caught in a current you should try and swim with it and gradually make your way back to shore. Don't panic, the most important thing is to conserve your energy.

Watch the sun. While swimming, you won't know that the sun's rays are burning you until it's too late. Due to reflections from the water the sun's rays will be more intense and you will need to reapply sunscreen frequently.

Boating. Make sure the captain is experienced and competent to operate the boat and follows all posted regulations and guidelines for boater safety. Federal regulations require all children under 13 to wear a life jacket while boating. Here in Minnesota, all children 10 and under must wear a life jacket.

Alcohol and water never mix. Alcohol is especially disorienting when you are on the water, and it is involved in many water related injuries and up to half of all water related deaths.

Be prepared for an emergency. Alysia Yeager, Disaster Services Coordinator for the Steele County office of the American Red Cross, reminds you that the best time to prepare for an emergency is before it happens. The Steele County Red Cross offers many different classes in First Aid and CPR and courses specifically designed for water safety. Check with the local office regarding CPR and First Aid at 507-451-2777 or online at www.redcross-semn.org. For more information about Red Cross Aquatics programs please contact Community Ed at 507-444-8600.

About CAER: "Steele County Community Awareness Emergency Response (CAER) is an organization with a purpose to help people, businesses, and agencies promote the highest possible community awareness and emergency response and recovery from disaster."