

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **COVID-19 CLOSURES RAISE FEAR OF CHILD DROWNINGS**

Private swim school owners want to save lives. That's why members of the Oregon Swim Schools Coalition fear what will happen if their schools remain closed.

As they state, "Kids do not stop drowning during a pandemic."

OSSC members focus on teaching water safety, including essential life-saving skills. They represent more than 75 professional aquatic educators and serve more than 10,000 children in Oregon.

"Swimming lessons provide an important layer of protection for anyone in or around any body of water," said Debbie Sayers, owner of DoIFUN SWIM Academy in Portland.

Drowning is the No. 1 cause of death in children ages one to four and the second leading cause of death in children under age 14. Among the youngest, a whopping 90 percent drown while under adult supervision. While many child drownings happen in home swimming pools, open water anywhere presents a danger.

That includes lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and the ocean, which become more crowded during the nice Oregon summer weather. It only takes a moment's distraction for tragedy to strike.

Drowning is a silent event, not splashing around like in the movies.

"With parents distracted with working at home and kids spending more time at home, and with no swimming lessons available, we are very concerned the risk of drowning will be even higher than normal this summer," Sayers said.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development found children between ages one and four who participate in formal swimming lessons experienced an 88 percent reduction in the risk of drowning.

OSSC schools are not public pools. They are private schools that require scheduled appointments for each lesson. They should be considered essential businesses. Since summer camps, daycares and other children's activity centers can open, private swim schools should too.

With swim schools closed during the pandemic, Florida alone saw an alarming 70 percent increase in drownings in March and April this year compared to one year before.

Members of OSSC agree that private swim schools should open immediately to provide safety, health and wellbeing in Oregon's communities. They believe that pools should be allowed to open statewide for fitness, therapy and swimming lessons. These life-saving programs should begin now!

According to the CDC, "There is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread to people through the water used in pools, hot tubs, or water playgrounds. Proper operation and disinfection of pools, hot tubs, and water playgrounds should kill the virus that causes COVID-19."

Oregon's private swim schools are ready to meet CDC and Oregon Health Authority guidelines for safety, including physical distancing, masks, stable grouping, contact tracing, sanitation and disinfecting.

On May 5, OSSC sent a letter to Gov. Kate Brown to outline their ability to follow safety guidelines. They also asked that their schools be allowed to open immediately. Though they have not received a direct reply, the governor's office announced a new Phase II plan May 29.

The plan includes opening swimming pools, with one restriction being that businesses must have completed three weeks in Phase I. Multnomah county plans to enter Phase I on June 21. Under the governor's plan, Portland-area swim schools would not open until July 12.

Oregon's private swim school owners express concern that waiting means too many lives will be lost to drowning.

On May 26, several national aquatic organizations joined in sending a plea to Pres. Donald J. Trump and Deborah Birx, one of the president's advisors on the COVID-19 pandemic, to reopen swimming pools nationwide. The groups represent more than 5,000 professional aquatics businesses.

When the shutdown occurred in March, more than 300,000 aquatic professionals lost their jobs, according to the letter.

Opening swim schools “would allow children to learn much needed water safety and drowning prevention skills,” the authors said. “It would allow the 500,000 youth athletes on America’s swim teams to get back to their training. It would allow MILLIONS of American adults to exercise safely and build their immune systems which is needed now more than ever!”

May is National Water Safety month. Let’s open swim schools now and keep everyone safe.

For more water safety tips and detailed information about National Water Safety Month, visit [www.nationalwatersafetymonth.org](http://www.nationalwatersafetymonth.org), [www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html](http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html), [www.watersafetyusa.org](http://www.watersafetyusa.org), [www.stopdrowningnow.org](http://www.stopdrowningnow.org), [www.hopefloats.foundation](http://www.hopefloats.foundation) or [www.ndpa.org/](http://www.ndpa.org/)

## **SIDE BARS**

### **6 WATER SAFETY TIPS TO HELP SAVE A LIFE THIS SUMMER**

1. Learn to Swim: No matter your age, learning to swim is one of the best ways to be safer in and around the water.
2. Constant Adult Supervision: Actively supervise children and non-swimmers around the water, even when lifeguards are present. Avoid distracting activities such as chatting or checking email or social media.
3. Look for Lifeguards: Swim in designated areas supervised by lifeguards.
4. Swim with a Buddy: Do not swim alone. Even at a public pool or a lifeguarded beach, use the buddy system.
5. Wear a Lifejacket: Adults and children should always wear a Coast Guard-approved lifejacket while boating. Non-swimmers and inexperienced swimmers should also always wear a lifejacket when in or around the water. Inflatable toys can be fun but are not a substitute for U.S. Coast Guard-approved lifejackets.
6. Learn CPR: Learn how to prevent and respond to emergencies by learning CPR.

### **Places drownings are most likely to occur**

Lakes = 26%  
Rivers = 25%  
Pools = 23%  
Oceans = 10%  
Ponds = 7%  
Bathtubs = 2%  
Ditches = 1%  
Hot tubs = 1%  
Waterparks = .02%

Sources: USA Swimming, Total Programming Aquatics, American Academy of Pediatrics, CDC, CPSC, NDPA, NIT and the Hope Floats Foundation.

The OSSC represents over 75 professional aquatic educators and serves more than 10,000 children in Oregon.

### **OSSC representative members:**

Children of the Sea, Portland. AJ Chase and Lynne Zaverski, owners  
DoIFUN SWIM Academy and DoIFUN PRO Training Institute, Portland. Debbie Sayers, owner  
Farber Swim School, Beaverton. Adam and Kristin Farber, owner  
Little Splashes Swim School, Hood River. Hannah Freeman, owner  
Rogue Aquatics, Central Point. Kathy Zuk, owner  
SWIMBABES, Portland. Kelley Robinson, owner

