

Keep It  
*safe!*



## SWIMMING<sup>1</sup>



### INTRODUCTION

Swimming is practised by about half of the population between the ages of 6 and 74, and ranks third among the most popular physical and recreational activities in Québec, after walking and cycling.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of a nearly 20% decrease in the number of deaths related to swimming since 2000, the risks associated with swimming, in addition to the popularity of the sport, make for an average of 17 drowning deaths per year in Québec. This number does not include accidental falls, where the victim had no intention of going swimming. Most drowning deaths related to swimming occur in rivers and lakes (63%), in residential or private pools (27%) or, more rarely, in public pools (6%).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this context, *swimming* refers to all activities practised in the water, without a boat, including swimming as a sport, diving and playing in the water. However, it does not include underwater diving.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Hamel and Benoit Tremblay, *Étude des blessures subies au cours de la pratique d'activités récréatives et sportives au Québec en 2009-2010*, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, Direction de l'analyse et de l'évaluation des systèmes de soins et services, May 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Benoit Tremblay et al., *Pertinent Facts About Drownings and Other Water-Related Deaths in Québec, 2000-2008 — 2010 Edition*, Trois-Rivières, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, Direction de la promotion de la sécurité, 2010.

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According to the information available, no drowning deaths have occurred as part of supervised training sessions or swimming competitions. Drowning is associated mainly with swimming as it is defined here, while the intensive practice of swimming as a sport is more associated with risks of injury, specifically stress injuries. Diving in shallow water involves a serious risk of spinal cord injury. Every year, on average, eight people in Québec<sup>4</sup> suffer terrible consequences such as paraplegia, quadriplegia and head injuries.

Near-drowning is also an important phenomenon, as it can have dramatic consequences. On average, 46 people are hospitalized in Québec every year after nearly drowning. About half of these people are children aged 0 to 5 years old.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. THE ABILITY TO SWIM AND KNOWLEDGE OF WATER SAFETY AND FIRST AID

Although learning to swim is no guarantee against drowning, it can certainly help those who like to play in water to deal with dangerous situations. However, even if swimming lessons are recommended for all children over the age of three, they are not necessarily a good idea for younger children and are not advisable for babies under one year old.

There is a danger that infants and very young children may not be able to keep their head above water and that the attending adult may get distracted.

For those who practise water sports, and especially for owners of residential pools, the speed and quality of first aid for the victim can make the difference between life, death and near drowning. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid training are essential. Knowledge of the basic principles of life-saving and self-rescue would also be useful for anyone who likes to swim.

Children and adults can take swimming lessons and learn about water safety by contacting the person in charge of swimming lessons at their local pool. It is a good idea to make sure that the lessons are recognized by one of the following organizations: the Canadian Red Cross, the Lifesaving Society, which will also teach life-saving techniques and water safety, or the Fédération de natation du Québec, which will put more emphasis on learning to swim properly.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## 2. PLACES TO SWIM

### Natural bodies of water

Most drowning deaths related to swimming occur in rivers, including the St. Lawrence River and waterfalls. Indeed, rapids and white water present considerable risk factors for swimmers. Lakes follow closely as settings for drowning deaths. It is important to check certain factors before venturing into a natural body of water. Is there a current? How deep is the water? Is the water cold? Waterfalls and rapids are pretty, but swimming there can be fatal. Respect the signage on the shores of these bodies of water and, above all, avoid swimming or stepping into the water on your own.

### Residential pools

The main danger with residential pools is the easy access to them. The *Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act*, adopted in 2010, provides standards that must be followed by all owners of pools installed after October 31, 2010. Although this Act is provincial in scope, municipalities can adopt stricter standards if they wish to do so. Contact your municipality for information about its standards. For further details about the safety of residential pools and legislation, please visit [www.perfectswimming.com/en/home](http://www.perfectswimming.com/en/home).

In addition, most residential pools are not the required size for safe diving. It is best not to install a diving board and to avoid using it if it is already there. For further information, please consult the norms for residential swimming pools equipped with a diving board, available in French at [http://www.bnq.qc.ca/documents/depliant\\_plongeoir.pdf](http://www.bnq.qc.ca/documents/depliant_plongeoir.pdf).

### Public swimming areas

Public swimming areas (swimming pools and public beaches) are subject to the *Régie du bâtiment du Québec*, and users must obey the rules. The *Regulation respecting safety in public baths* sets strict standards for the installations and equipment, as well as for surveillance. When you visit these places, you must follow the rules and the signs posted. In addition, you must constantly watch any young children in your care, even though there are lifeguards present. It is even more important to be vigilant near a natural body of water, where visibility in the water may be reduced and the environment less safe than around a pool. It is important to stay in the swimming area, which is usually marked with buoys.

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## 3. FLOTATION DEVICES

There is a variety of inflatable toys and equipment, such as swimming belts and balls, available on the market. It is best not to count on these devices as flotation aids or to make up for an inability to swim. These toys must not be confused with equipment that has been specially designed to help people practise swimming strokes or learn to swim in a monitored context.

As a tool to prevent drowning, the personal flotation device with an appropriate label from Transport Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard or Fisheries and Oceans Canada is the best equipment for very young children and non-swimmers.

## 4. BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES

Below are some tips to safely and fully enjoy the pleasures of swimming:

- Always swim with other people.
- Beware of rapids and white water.
- Obey the signs.
- Learn to swim.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or taking drugs.
- Close off access to the pool using an automatic locking device.
- Learn the basics of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
- Constantly watch children near water.
- Go into the water with very small children and stay near them (within arm's reach).
- Have small children and non-swimmers wear a personal flotation device.
- Avoid overestimating your ability.
- Always check how deep the water is before diving in.
- Never dive into shallow water.

For further information about preventing drowning and about rules for public swimming areas:

Canadian Red Cross  
6, place du Commerce  
Verdun (Québec) H3E 1P4  
Telephone: 514-362-2929  
Fax: 514-362-9991

Lifesaving Society  
4545, avenue Pierre-de-Coubertin  
Montréal (Québec) H1V 0B2  
Telephone: 514-252-3100  
Fax: 514-252-6232

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Régie du bâtiment du Québec (public baths)  
545, boulevard Crémazie Est  
Montréal (Québec) H2M 2V2  
Telephone: 514-873-0976  
Fax: 514-873-6750

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