



STAFF PHOTO/SUSIE KOCKERSCHIEDT

SWIMMING SAFETY:

128 – water related deaths in Ontario last year and 404 drowning deaths Canadawide;

35 per cent – of drowning deaths occur at either a lake or a pond;

24 per cent – of drowning deaths occur at rivers, streams or creeks;

10 per cent – of drowning deaths occur at an ocean;

22 per cent – of drowning deaths between 2005 to 2007 occurred while the victim was swimming;

5 per cent – of drowning deaths from 2005 to 2007 occurred while the victim was playing or wading in shallow water; and

3 per cent – of drowning deaths from 2005 to 2007 occurred when the victim was diving into water.

— lifesavingsociety.com

Kate Tomoski (from left) of Stouffville, Isabella Melo of Mt. Albert and Erica Barnard enjoy De La Salle Park beach on Lake Simcoe's Jackson's Point in Georgina Tuesday.

Be wary of water with fearless kids, experts say

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With the mercury already soaring above 30 degrees C several times this month, residents have been beating the heat at some of York's 14 beaches.

However, this is national drowning prevention week, when the key message is to play safe. Lifesaving Society public education director Barbara Byers said.

Younger children are absolutely fearless of the water, she said.

There is a magnetic attraction to water, as well. So, it's our job, as adults, to control access to the water, she added.

There were more than 400 water-related deaths in Ontario last year and about 22 per cent occurred while the victim was swimming.

This year's message for parents is simple, Ms Byers said.

"Get off your towel and play in the water with them," she said. "Be the lifeguard for your kids. See and watch them."

'It's a lovely sandy beach and it's all shallow and whamo; it drops off.'

When playing in the water, you should be within arm's reach of your child and never take your eyes off them, Ms Byers added.

"Drowning is silent," she said. "It's not like in the movies where the person is yelling. You can't hear someone shout or see someone wave

their arms because they are under water. Kids can go under and get a gulp of water."

That doesn't mean you should avoid the beach this summer.

"Have fun, because the water is cool and we all love to be out there," Ms Byers said. "But all boys look the same in the water from your towel."

It's also just as important to keep watch over your child in shallow wading waters.

"It's a lovely sandy beach and it's all shallow and whamo; it drops off. It's very easy to lose your footing, even in knee-deep waters."

The Lifesaving Society recommends children wear life jackets when playing near water, rather than relying on water wings or inflatable bathing suits, because a life jacket helps ensure a child's head stays

► For more information and water safety tips, visit lifesavingsociety.com

above water, Ms Byers said, adding a child's head has a higher percentage of the child's body weight.

"With water wings, their arms float," she said. "That's not the point. Floating arms won't help them."

It is also recommended for children older than 5 years old to take swimming and water survival lessons.

Also, when using an air mattress, be sure not to go farther than your ability to swim back.

Residents should also be mindful of water conditions, particularly following rainfall.

The region tests for water bacteria levels at each of its beaches once

a week from mid June to the end of August, manager of community and health services Bernard Mayer said.

Beaches are either marked with a blue or red sign. A blue sign means the water meets satisfactory levels and is safe for residents to swim.

A red sign means higher levels of bacteria and should serve as a warning for you to keep your head above water, since you could be susceptible to eye, ear and nose infections or a water-borne illness.

In severe cases, such as a sewage spill, severe pollution, flood or hurricane, the region will close beaches, Mr. Mayer said.

For more information on the state of the region's beaches, contact York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 or visit york.ca and click on the sampling site.



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