

HENNEPIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

News Release



Media Contact:
Lisa Kiava
(612) 919-5918

Memorial Day Weekend Preview: **Parents urged to create a swim safety plan**

May 27, 2010 (Plymouth) – The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office and Life Time Fitness are urging parents to create a swim safety plan for their families prior to the Memorial Day weekend.

Today, at Life Time Fitness in Plymouth, Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek and Alicia Kockler, National Aquatics Program Manager for Life Time Fitness, discussed ways all citizens can reduce the risk of drowning and water-related accidents.

Parents and caregivers should learn to use Active Supervision:

- A responsible adult focuses on children when they are in – or near – the water.
- The assigned adult should not be talking on a cell phone, reading a magazine, or closing their eyes for sunbathing.
- Parents and caregivers may rotate this responsibility to have a “fresh set of eyes” on the children.
- Active Supervision is needed even when there are lifeguards on duty and even when children are wearing life jackets.

“At Life Time Fitness, active supervision means that a parent or guardian is within ten feet of the child at all times even if it means the parent or guardian must get in the water,” said Kockler, “You simply can't actively supervise your child from the pool deck.”

The recommendations generally apply to children under age 12 but parents should also put appropriate safety measures in place for teens, based on swimming ability.

Drowning can happen in as little as :30-:45 seconds and it is silent – someone who is drowning does not splash or scream for help. In 70% of cases where toddlers drowned, one or both parents were nearby when the drowning took place.

“There is nothing more heartbreaking for our deputies than responding to the scene of a drowning involving a child,” said Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek, “These tragedies are preventable and I am urging parents and caregivers to create a safety plan now – before summer swimming season begins.”

Minnesota is the land of ten thousand lakes. Hennepin County is home to 104 named lakes and three major rivers. Many people use extra caution when swimming in natural bodies of water. Yet, in Hennepin County in recent years, most drownings and near drownings have taken place in swimming pools and hot tubs.

A review of statistics for 2008-2009 in Hennepin County shows **there have been 27 drownings and reported near drownings in swimming pools and hot tubs compared to 14 drownings and near drownings in natural bodies of water.**

The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office responds to, and investigates, all water-related emergencies in the county.

In addition to Active Supervision, the Sheriff's Office recommends that parents and caregivers use several safety measures to reduce the risk of drowning and near-drowning, including:

- Teach your kids to swim – starting as early as age one, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- The American Red Cross recommends that inexperienced swimmers wear life jackets in swimming pools. Parents must use active supervision even when children are wearing life jackets.
- Do not rely on water wings or other devices.
- Learn CPR.
- Keep safety equipment near swimming pools such as a shepherd's hook and a telephone to call for help, if needed.
- Check drain covers and learn about drain cover safety.
- Maintain needed fencing, alarms, and barriers around swimming pools.
- Swim in areas with lifeguards on duty for added safety. However, do not rely on life guards to watch your children.
- If a child is missing, first search any area of water.

For media inquiries, contact PIO Lisa Kiava at 612-919-5918 or lisa.kiava@co.hennepin.mn.us or Life Time Fitness Public Relations Manager, Kent Wipf at 952-229-7211 or kwipf@lifetimefitness.com

###