

# Top 5 Ways Children Die From Injury in Wisconsin

(Data from 2020-24 - released in 2025)



Please be advised: some content and images in this report may be distressing or emotionally challenging for some people.

Dear Wisconsin residents,

**A child death is a community tragedy, especially if it could have been prevented.**

Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin has spent nearly 20 years learning how and why children die. Our team studies risk factors and events that lead to these deaths. We use these findings to work with experts statewide to prevent future deaths.

**This report shows the top five causes of injury-related deaths that affect children from infants to 17 years of age in Wisconsin.** Injury-related deaths result from physical harm and are grouped as unintentional (drownings, falls, motor vehicle crashes, etc.) or intentional (homicide, suicide or violence).

While there is no single way to prevent injury-related deaths, working together to address barriers has proven to be most effective. There are countless local, statewide and national efforts focused on preventing injury-related deaths to children. Several are mentioned in this report.

**We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all partners and agencies working together across Wisconsin to keep kids alive.**



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Executive Director,  
Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin

## REPORT NOTES

- Data limitations: Vital statistics data uses ICD-10 codes to categorize deaths based on the immediate cause. Some factors that may have played a role in a child's death, such as a finding of child maltreatment, are not always captured in this data.
- The maps in this report are based on the child's county of residence, not the location of the incident.
- EPI-wise Notes provide insights from our epidemiologist.
- For additional data information focused on Milwaukee and Fox Valley, visit the Children's Wisconsin Community Health Needs Assessments:  
<https://childrenswi.org/who-we-are/community-programs/community-reports>
- This report was prepared by Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin. Email [chaw@childrenswi.org](mailto:chaw@childrenswi.org) for information about this report.

# SUMMARY

Injuries are the leading cause of death among children in Wisconsin. Between 2020-24, more than 850 children died from all injury-related causes. These are deaths that, unlike many natural causes, can often be prevented. This report examines the five most common injury-related causes of child death in Wisconsin to inform prevention efforts. The data in this report is from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services vital records from 2020-24.

**DATA**  
2020-24

**AGES**  
0 to 17

## Top 5 Ways Children Die From Injury In Wisconsin

2 out of 3 children who died from one of these causes were boys.



### **FIREARM - 217**

In Wisconsin, firearms caused more child deaths than any other single cause from 2020-24 (data includes homicides, suicides and unintentional deaths).



### **MOTOR VEHICLE CRASH - 216**

67% of motor vehicle crash deaths were teens (driving and/or passenger).



### **SUFFOCATION (IN A SLEEP ENVIRONMENT) - 102**

Suffocation in a sleep environment was the most common injury-related cause of death among infants with those younger than age 6 months being at the highest risk.



### **SUICIDE (NON-FIREARM) - 79**

75% of suicide deaths that did not involve a firearm injury were the result of hanging, strangulation and suffocation.



### **DROWNING - 55**

73% of Wisconsin child drownings occurred in natural bodies of water like lakes and rivers.

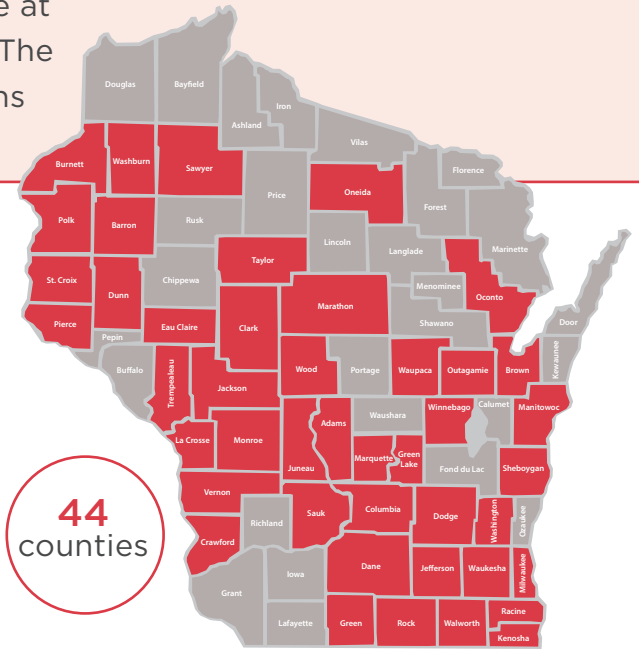


# FIREARM

In Wisconsin, firearms caused more child deaths than any other single cause from 2020-24, with at least 217 children dying from a firearm injury. The problem of firearms-related injuries and deaths

among children is of growing concern, with a 47% increase in annual firearms deaths in 2024 compared to 2020.

Most of these deaths were homicides, followed by suicides and unintentional injuries. The median age at death was 16 years for boys and 14 years for girls. The most common type of weapon used in these deaths was a handgun.



Counties with at least one child death by firearm.

## Who is most impacted?

- 78% were boys, mostly ages 15 to 17.
- 54% of firearm suicides were in rural counties (despite only 30% of the population living there).<sup>1</sup>
- 93% of firearm homicides occurred in urban counties.<sup>2</sup>

### EPI-wise NOTE



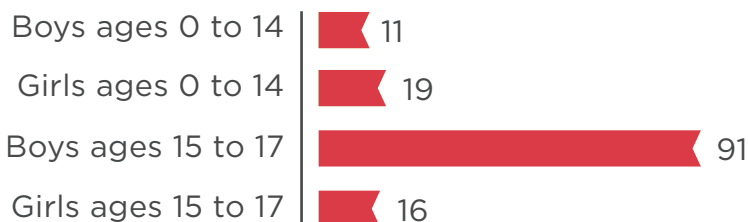
*Homicides by firearm increased by 32% during 2020-24.*

### EPI-wise NOTE

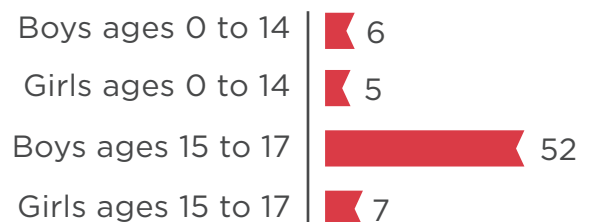


*Suicides by firearm more than doubled during 2020-24.*

### HOMICIDE BY FIREARM



### SUICIDE BY FIREARM



# FIREARM PREVENTION

## NATIONAL LEVEL Prevention



- Agree to Agree – is an initiative focused on finding common ground to reduce the impact of gun violence on children and teens across all communities in the U.S.  
<https://agreetoagree.org/>
- Sandy Hook Promise – has a mission to educate and empower youth and adults to prevent violence in schools, homes, and communities through proven evidence-informed Know the Signs program. They also teach young people and adults to recognize, intervene, and get help for individuals who may be socially isolated and/or at risk of hurting themselves or others. <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/>

## STATE LEVEL Prevention



- The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – safety experts promote firearm safety by sharing the four basic rules of firearm safety.  
<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/Education/OutdoorSkills/HuntingSafety>
  - Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
  - Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
  - Be certain of your target, what is before and beyond it.
  - Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.

## LOCAL LEVEL Prevention



- Distribution of Gun Locks – communities across the state promote responsible gun ownership by sharing messaging around safe gun storage and providing free gun locks at events like county fairs, health care events and others.
- Project ChildSafe – is an organization that encourages local law enforcement agencies to order free firearm safety kits that can be distributed at community events. View the link to see if a law enforcement agency in your community already is a partner, reach out and discuss collaboration opportunities. <https://projectchildsafesafe.org/>

<sup>1</sup> Urban and rural counties are defined based on the Wisconsin Department of Health's designations for years 2020 and later. A map of urban and rural county designations can be found at: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/wish/urban-rural.htm>

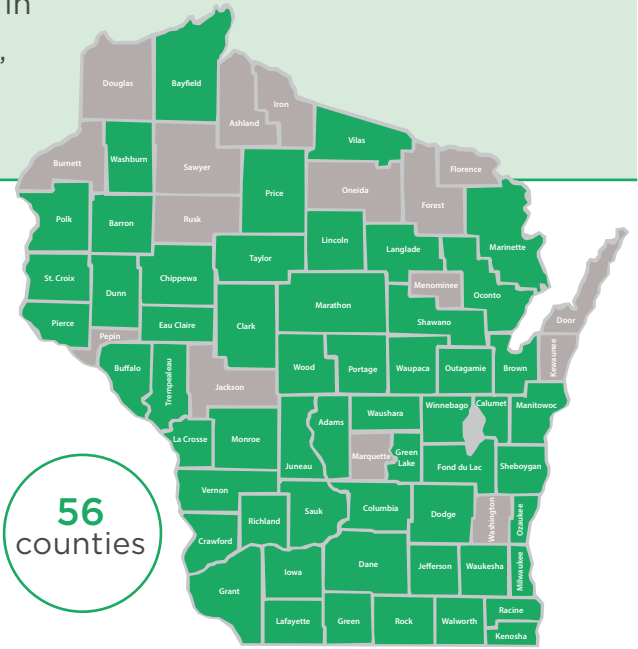
<sup>2</sup> Milwaukee County had the greatest burden of child homicide deaths involving firearms. 79% children who died in this manner were residents of Milwaukee County.



# MOTOR VEHICLE CRASH

From 2020-24, motor vehicle crashes were the most common **unintentional** injury-related cause of death among children in Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup> The types of vehicles involved in these incidents include cars, vans, trucks, motorcycles, all terrain vehicles (ATVs), utility task vehicles (UTVs) and other recreational and industrial vehicles.

For crashes where the type of vehicle involved was known, 63% involved a child either driving or riding in a car, van, or truck. 21% were pedestrians or cyclists, 11% were on an ATV and 4% were on a motorcycle.



Counties with at least one child death by motor vehicle crash.

## Who is most impacted?

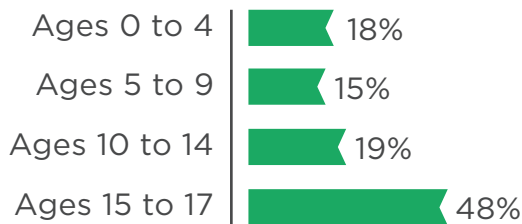


Rural counties only represent 30% of the population, yet they accounted for 51% of child deaths from motor vehicle crashes.



70% of teen driver deaths were boys.

## CHILD MOTOR VEHICLE CRASH DEATHS



## EPI-wise NOTE



*Rural communities face the highest burden of ATV and UTV deaths.*



59% of pedestrian deaths were children ages 5 and younger.



Half of all teen deaths involved teenage drivers.



Half of ATV and UTV deaths were between ages 10 to 14. A quarter were younger than age 12.

# MOTOR VEHICLE CRASH PREVENTION

## NATIONAL LEVEL Prevention



- The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration's Local and Rural Road Safety Program provides tools and resources to help reduce motor vehicle crash fatalities.

<https://highways.dot.gov/fed-aid-essentials/videos/other-programs/safety-and-planning-introduction-highway-safety>

## STATE LEVEL Prevention



- Zero in Wisconsin is a statewide campaign that addresses impaired driving, distracted driving, speeding, pedestrian safety and seat belt use. <https://zeroinwisconsin.gov/>
- Children's Wisconsin Teen Driving Program: Teaches teens safe driving habits and responsible decision-making (reducing distraction, speeding, and impaired driving). <https://childrenswi.org/family-resources/parenting-resources/safety-center/teen-driving>
- Visit the Safe Kids Wisconsin webpage, led by Children's Wisconsin, to view locations that provide car seat installation support by county.

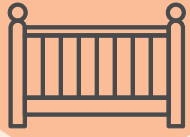
<https://www.safekidswi.org/events/Car-Seat-by-Appointment>

## LOCAL LEVEL Prevention



- Oconto County: ATV Safety for Youth - Oconto County partnered with public health, Children's Wisconsin, ATV dealers and safety instructors to improve ATV safety for young riders. The project promotes helmet use (helmets reduce risk by 88%) and safety gear affordability for families.
- Waupaca County: Impaired Driving Prevention Safe Ride Program to reduce impaired driving - The Waupaca County Child Death Review Team (CDR) team identified alcohol use and changing driving patterns during COVID-19 as contributing factors in motor vehicle crashes. In response, they promoted the Safe Ride Program to reduce impaired driving. <https://www.tlw.org/saferide/>
- Outagamie County: Pedestrian Safety - After two youth pedestrian deaths in 12 months, the Outagamie County CDR team recommended actions to improve pedestrian safety. These include installing mirrors, cameras or audible alarms on large commercial vehicles; increasing the use of audible signals and flags at crosswalks; and expanding crossing guard coverage. <https://www.ecwrpc.org/programs/transportation/srts/>

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this report, "motor vehicle crash" refers only to unintentional crashes of land transport vehicles where the child was either an operator or passenger of or struck by a vehicle such as a car, truck, all-terrain vehicle (ATV), Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) or "side-by-side", motorcycle, or other land transport vehicle.

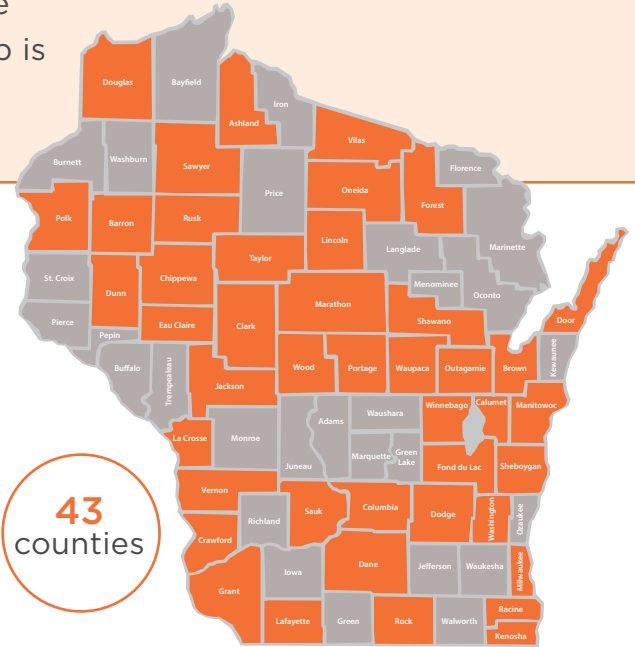


# SUFFOCATION (IN A SLEEP ENVIRONMENT)

From 2020-24, 102 children in Wisconsin died from suffocation in a sleep environment, including 94 infants younger than age 1. Suffocation in a sleep environment occurs when a child's airway is obstructed by items, people or pets during sleep.

**Infants (younger than age 1) account for most of these deaths.**

Focusing prevention efforts on education to anyone caring for an infant including the ABCs of safe sleep is important in reducing these deaths in Wisconsin.



Counties with at least one child death by suffocation in a sleep environment.

## Who is most impacted?



92% died within the first 12 months.  
76% died within the first 6 months.  
46% died within the first 3 months.



Rural counties only represent 30% of the population, yet they accounted for 40% of deaths.

## SUFFOCATION IN A SLEEP ENVIRONMENT



94  
Infants

## EPI-wise NOTE



*Common risk factors:*

- *Soft bedding or toys in the sleep environment.*
- *Adults, other children or pets sharing a sleep surface.*
- *Being placed on their stomach or side instead of on their back.*
- *Sleeping on adult beds, couches, or other surfaces besides cribs or bassinets designed for infants.*

## Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) includes:

- Suffocation in a sleep environment (included in this data).
- Deaths due to unknown or undetermined causes. (An additional 150 infant deaths were unknown or undetermined and as a result were not included in this data).

# SUFFOCATION PREVENTION

## NATIONAL LEVEL Prevention



- Charlie's Kids is an organization that works with families and caregivers to educate about the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) safe sleep practices. They have books, short videos, and other tools to encourage families and help implement safe sleep for every sleep time. <https://www.charlieskids.org/>

## STATE LEVEL Prevention



- In 2024 the Alliance launched a safe-sleep pilot and expanded it in 2025. Ten sites staffed community events—farmers markets, baby showers, health fairs and storytimes—with a display featuring a portable crib, a doll and assorted items placed inside. Attendees were asked to remove objects until only the doll remained to demonstrate a safe sleep surface. The goal was to teach what a safe infant sleep environment looks like and to normalize it. Each site gathered brief survey data on education and home practices to bring family perspectives into future outreach. Sleep sacks, board books and other resources were distributed at events.

<https://www.chawiconsin.org/download/2025-sleep-baby-safe-survey-snapshot/?wpdmdl=27183&masterkey=yjKplV-W8oV6H2SF8qSg1cN0wNJIWgob4FuG-GsrM7VISvXatkKdLmnp6OvZR2XxTPBID3YIxORrrS55d6hN2X0g5o6zPVZudReX5hzjQrg>

## LOCAL LEVEL Prevention



- Rock County presents at local babysitter courses, middle schools, and high schools to educate early about how babies can sleep safely for naptime and nighttime sleep. Education includes AAP safe sleep information and hands-on training with dolls that demonstrate the neurological effects as a result of shaking an infant.



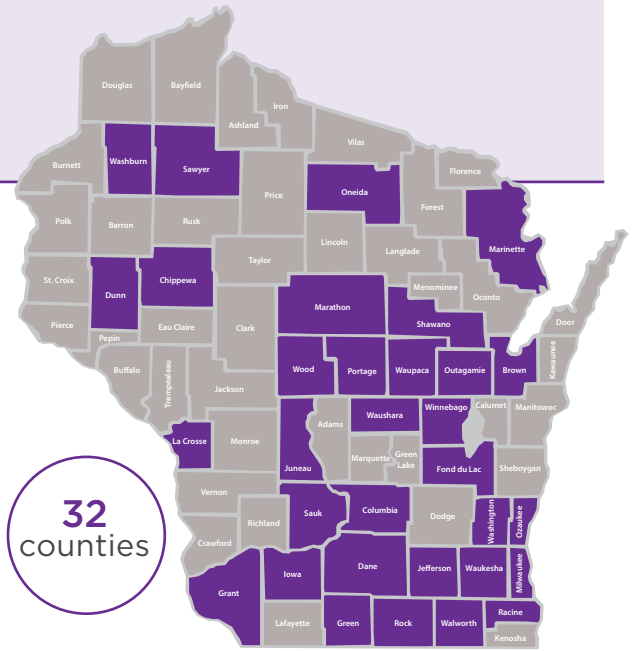


# SUICIDE (NON-FIREARM)

Each year from 2020-24, an average of 16 children died by suicide using means other than a firearm.

**75% of suicide deaths that did not involve a firearm injury were the result of hanging, strangulation and suffocation.**

14% involved intentional self-poisoning, and 11% involved other means, including intentionally crashing a motor vehicle, jumping from a high place, drowning, and jumping or lying before a moving object.



Counties with at least one child death by suicide (non-firearm).

## Who is most impacted?



Rural children are more likely to use cars or other vehicles (driving or struck by).



Urban children are more likely to use hanging.

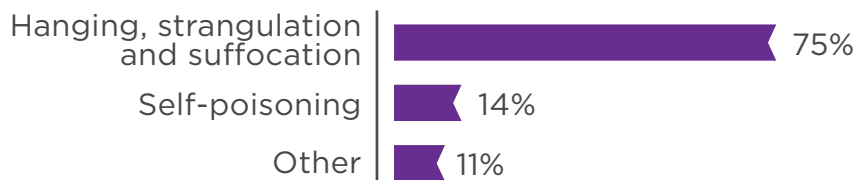


Boys were more likely to use a firearm.



Girls were more likely to use a non-firearm.

## SUICIDE (NON-FIREARM)



## SELF-POISONING 82% WERE GIRLS



The most common substances were diphenhydramine (a type of allergy medication) and prescriptions.

## AGE 15 AVERAGE



Children who died by suicide using means other than firearms ranged in ages from 10 to 17 years

## EPI-wise NOTE



Boys are overall more likely to die from suicide and are more likely to use firearms for suicide as compared to girls.

## EPI-wise NOTE



While non-firearm suicides decreased 48%, firearm suicides more than doubled. This shows a concerning shift in method.

# SUICIDE PREVENTION

## NATIONAL LEVEL Prevention



- 988 Suicide & Crisis LIFELINE – Is the national mental health hotline that offers emotional support for anyone experiencing mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug concerns, or just need someone to talk. <https://988lifeline.org/>
- Crisis Text Line – Provides free, confidential, 24/7, high-quality text-based mental health support and crisis intervention by volunteer crisis counselors. <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

## STATE LEVEL Prevention



- Center for Suicide Awareness – is a statewide resource that brings help, hope and resources to families and individuals in communities through programs that reach people where they are and when they need it most. <https://www.centerforsuicideawareness.org/>
- Prevent Suicide Wisconsin – is a statewide public-private partnership whose mission is to reduce the number of people who attempt and/or die by suicide in Wisconsin. <https://www.preventsuicidewi.org/home>

## LOCAL LEVEL Prevention



- Mental Health Connection – is a Waukesha County suicide prevention initiative dedicated to reducing the number of deaths by suicide by raising awareness about evidence-based mental health prevention practices, stigma reduction and access to treatment. <https://www.mentalhealthconnection.life/>
- Prevent Suicide Wisconsin – has local chapters in communities across the state with a mission to reduce the number of people who attempt and/or die by suicide in Wisconsin. Find a local chapter near you for help, to access resources or get involved. <https://www.preventsuicidewi.org/find-a-local-coalition>



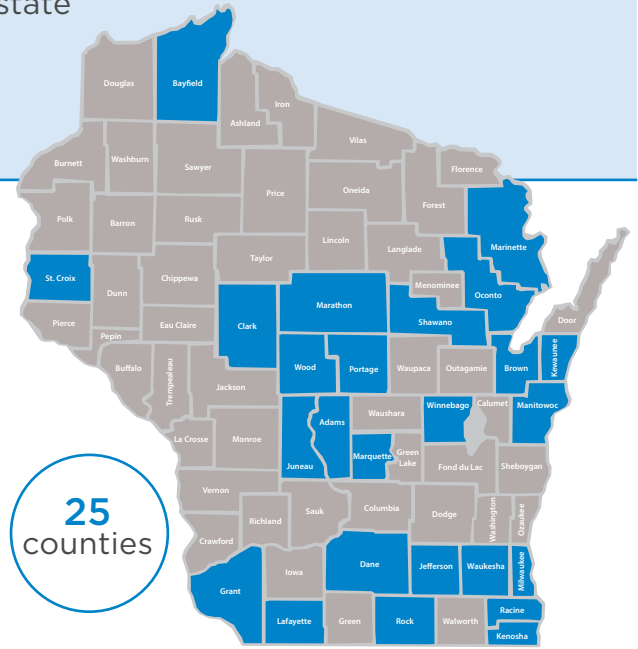
# DROWNING

Every year from 2020-24, an average of 11 children died by drowning in Wisconsin. Most of these deaths occurred in natural bodies of water such as lakes, rivers and ponds during the summer months. Wisconsin differs from national trends in child drowning due in part to differences in climate. In warmer parts of the country, home pools pose a significant risk to the safety of children, especially those ages 1 to 4.

In Wisconsin, children of all ages are affected. As a state known for its lakes, water safety measures are critically important to minimize risks.

## Who is most impacted?

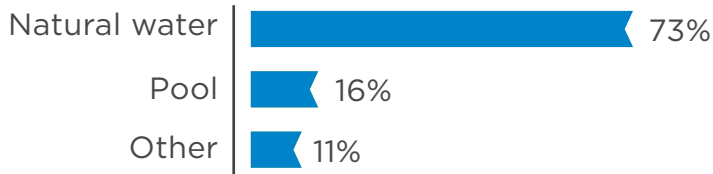
Boys of all ages are at greater risk than girls for drowning.



25 counties

Counties with at least one child death by drowning.

### CHILD DROWNINGS



## Key data

**73%** occurred in natural bodies of water (not pools).

**73%** of drowning fatalities were boys.

**56%** of pool drownings were toddlers ages 1 to 3.

**11%** were out-of-state residents.

### EPI-wise NOTE



Boys have a higher risk of drowning due to risk-taking behaviors, alcohol use and more time in aquatic environments.

# DROWNING PREVENTION

Focusing prevention efforts on public beaches and other natural bodies of water where children and families swim and play is likely the most impactful way of preventing drownings.

## NATIONAL LEVEL Prevention



- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Red Cross, YMCA and other organizations have collaborated to create a U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan which includes 99 action recommendations. Access this resource here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/partners/usnwsap.html>

## STATE LEVEL Prevention



- The DNR website has multiple education pages related to drowning prevention, including life jacket education, boat safety classes and river safety.



## LOCAL LEVEL Prevention



- Kenosha County posted signage in English and Spanish warning the public about strong currents posing a risk to swimmers at a location where drownings had occurred.
- Counties with lakes should be aware of out-of-state families or those unfamiliar with swimming in large natural bodies of water may not be aware of the risks. Adams County has begun working with local short-term rental property owners to reach tourists with risks.



<https://www.chawisconsin.org/initiatives/injury-prevention-death-review/prevention/>