



## Life Jackets

### OVERVIEW

Drowning is a leading cause of injury death for children ages 1-19. US Coast Guard-approved life jackets, when worn on personal watercrafts, can prevent deaths and injuries due to drowning. Many believe that children do not have to wear life jackets on personal watercraft or near natural swimming areas when the parent or other adult is in close proximity to the child, a life jacket for the child is on board in case of emergency, and/or the child has good swimming skills. However, these instances are exactly when drownings occur.

Federal law requires life jacket use for children younger than 13 years on recreational watercraft. However, this law is only enforced on waterways subject to US Coast Guard jurisdiction, leaving intrastate waterways subject only to the enforcement of state laws.

Many states require life jackets for young boaters, but no state mandates life jackets for all boaters younger than 18 and no state requires life jacket use by adult boaters.

### AAP POSITION

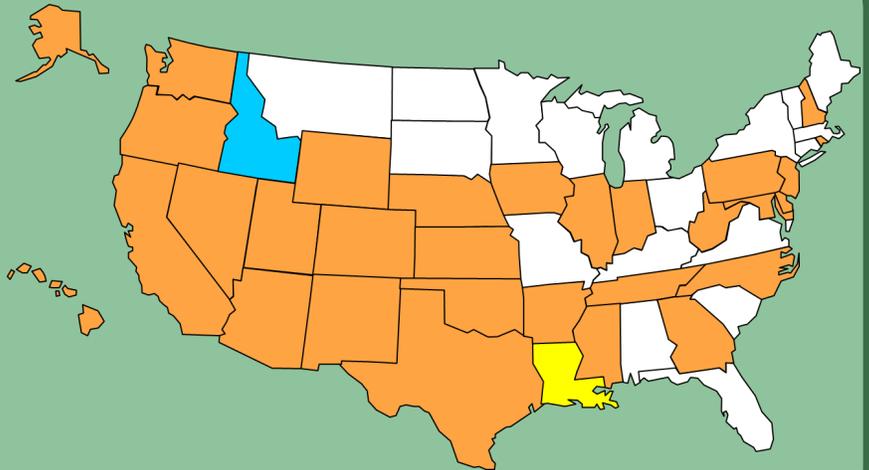
- All children and adolescents should be required by law to wear US Coast Guard-approved life jackets whenever they are in or on a watercraft.
- Parents and other adults should model appropriate behavior by wearing life jackets, because adult modeling behavior has been proven to influence child and adult behavior.
- Small children and nonswimmers should be required to wear life jackets when near water and while swimming in public pools and natural swimming areas.

## FACTS

- In 2017, nearly 1,000 children younger than 20 years old died from drowning, making drowning the 2nd leading cause of injury death for all children.
- In 2017, more than 8,700 younger than 20 visited a hospital emergency room for a drowning-related event and 25% of those children were hospitalized for additional care.
- According to the US Coast Guard, 84% of boat-related drowning deaths occur in individuals not wearing a life jacket.
- A study found that life jacket use among swimmers and waders decreased with age, with 50% of children under age 6 using life jackets compared to 3% of adults.
- More than half of open water drownings occur in children younger than 14 years of age, and a greater proportion of these occur in urban settings with populations over 1 million.

## PROGRESS

- 30 states and DC— laws requiring life jackets for boaters <13
- 1 state— law requiring life jackets for boaters <15
- 1 state— law requiring life jackets for boaters <17



For information on current law or pending legislation in your state, please contact AAP State Advocacy at [stgov@aap.org](mailto:stgov@aap.org)

## MORE

- [AAP Policy Statement: Prevention of Drowning](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2019/03/13/peds.2019-0850.full-text.pdf) — <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2019/03/13/peds.2019-0850.full-text.pdf>
- [AAP Technical Report: Prevention of Drowning](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2010/05/24/peds.2010-1265.full.pdf) — <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2010/05/24/peds.2010-1265.full.pdf>
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\): Drowning Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/safechild/drowning/) — <https://www.cdc.gov/safechild/drowning/>
- [AAP Resources: Water Safety](https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/child_death_review/Pages/Water-Safety.aspx) — [https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/child\\_death\\_review/Pages/Water-Safety.aspx](https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/child_death_review/Pages/Water-Safety.aspx)