# Lake, River and Open Water Safety Checklist

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A one-page checklist for lake, river and pond days: where to swim, life jackets, feet-first entry, currents, alcohol, storms and getting help.

**Letter page · For parents, teens, adults**

Almost half of drowning deaths among people 15 and older happen in natural water such as lakes, rivers and oceans (CDC). Lakes hide currents, drop-offs, rocks and cold water, so plan before you go.

## Before you get in

- [ ] Swim in a designated area, with a lifeguard if there is one.
- [ ] Check the weather and the water temperature. Dress for the water, not the air.
- [ ] Bring a Coast Guard-approved life jacket that fits for every child and weak swimmer.
- [ ] Name a Water Watcher for the kids. Phones away.

## In the water

- [ ] Swim with a buddy. Enter feet first; dive only where it's marked safe and at least 9 feet deep.
- [ ] No jumping from bridges, cliffs or boats.
- [ ] Watch for fast currents (even in shallow water), drop-offs, dams and things under the surface.
- [ ] No alcohol for swimmers or for anyone watching them.
- [ ] Thunder? Get out right away and stay indoors for at least 30 minutes after the last thunder.

**What you can do today:** pack the life jackets now and read why lakes are not pools. Someone in trouble? Call 911, then reach or throw, don't go.

### Sources

1. Risk Factors for Drowning, CDC. https://www.cdc.gov/drowning/risk-factors/index.html
2. Swimming Safely in Lakes, Rivers & Streams, American Red Cross. https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/water-safety/lake-river-safety.html
3. Life Jackets Save Lives, Water Safety USA. https://www.watersafetyusa.org/life-jackets-save-lives.html
4. Cold Water Hazards and Safety, National Weather Service. https://www.weather.gov/safety/coldwater

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