STILLWATER, Okla. – Relaxing at the lake with family and friends is a favorite summertime activity for many Oklahomans, but a good time on the water can quickly turn into a nightmare when easy-to-follow safety precautions are ignored.

“The reality is lots of accidental drownings and injuries are preventable. Paying attention to your safety doesn’t have to interfere with your fun,” said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of all drownings happen in natural water settings such as lakes, rivers and oceans.

One strategy that has been proven to reduce the risk of drowning is learning to swim. However, while boating, both adults and children should wear life U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets, even if they know how to swim.

“No matter the size of the boat, how far you are traveling or how well everyone on the boat can swim, always wear a life jacket,” Peek said. “Air-filled or foam toys such as water wings, noodles and inner tubes shouldn’t be used in place of life jackets.”

It also is important to be familiar with the terrain. For instance, are there drop-offs or hidden hazards in the water? Make an effort to understand the meanings of and obey all colored warning flags that may be posted on beaches, keeping in mind the meanings of flags may vary from beach to beach.

Additionally, watch closely for dangerous waves and avoid rip currents. Signs rip currents may be nearby include discolored water that is choppy, foamy or debris-filled and moving in a channel away from the shore.

Be sure to always enter the water feet first.

Finally, check the local weather forecast and conditions before getting in the water. High winds and storms with lightening can be extremely dangerous to boaters and swimmers.
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