

DNR News Release

For Immediate Release:

April 21, 2020

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[email](#) or call 888-646-6367.

DNR: Be safe, practice social distancing on the water

As boaters across Minnesota prepare to hit the water, they need to keep in mind tips for being safe on cold water as well as their responsibility for staying close to home and practicing socially distancing under Gov. Tim Walz's "Stay at Home" executive order.

"As Minnesotans, we have a natural urge to get outside this time of year – and for many of us, that's especially true this spring," said Rodmen Smith, DNR Enforcement Division director. "We constantly remind people about ways they can stay safe while they're on the water. In light of COVID-19, we also ask this year that you take additional steps to protect yourself, your family, and the people around you."

Cold-water safety

No matter when the ice went out, there's one common theme: The water this time of year is dangerously cold. Falls into the water can quickly turn tragic. With water temperatures not much above freezing, a fall in likely will trigger cold-water shock. Numbness will set in quickly, and swimming or calling for help will be difficult. You'll probably gasp uncontrollably and draw water into your lungs. Even strong swimmers may drown within minutes.

"The best way to prevent that from happening is to wear a life jacket – actually wear it, not just have it along," said Lisa Dugan, DNR Enforcement recreation safety outreach coordinator. "It's the easiest and most effective way to prevent an unfortunate situation from turning into a tragedy."

The cold-water season isn't the time to boat alone, either. This year, people should head out only with members of their immediate household and let others on shore know where they're going and when they plan to return. Keep the floor of the boat free of clutter to avoid tripping and falling into the water, and ensure the boat has safety equipment such as life jackets, communication and noise-making devices, and a first-aid kit.

Boating during COVID-19

When hitting the water, know the DNR's [COVID-19 outdoor recreation guidelines](#) and practice the following to protect yourselves and others:

- Maintain social distance of at least 6 feet. This includes places such as fuel stations and community docks, and means no beaching or tying up to other boats.

- Boat only with people in your immediate household.
- Boat close to home. Travel to and from the access site without making other stops.
- When fueling, wash your hands as you would when fueling a car. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- When launching and loading your boat, give people ahead of you plenty of time and space to finish launching or loading before you approach.
- Keep in mind water-access site conditions may be different than in previous years. DNR-managed accesses are open, but spring maintenance is not completed.
- If you have been diagnosed with, or are exhibiting symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (including fever, cough, or difficulty breathing), stay home. This self-isolation period should extend for at least seven days after the illness begins and include 72 hours of being fever-free without using fever-reducing medications and resolution of other symptoms.
- Know what's open. To see what DNR-managed sites are available, see the [DNR's COVID-19 website](#) or call the DNR information center at 651-296-6157 or 888 646-6367.

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