

Fact Sheet on Life Jackets

Over 80 percent of people who die from drowning during a boating incident in the United States were not wearing a life jacket.¹ Life jackets reduce the risk of drowning in both adults and children in or around water. People of all ages should wear a life jacket during boating.

What is a life jacket?

- Life jackets are a type of personal flotation device (PFD) that keeps a person's head above water even if they are unconscious.
- Life jackets are designed to help individuals stay in a position that allows for proper breathing while keeping them afloat in the water.²



Life jacket use among children

- Children should wear U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets appropriate for their age and size; caregivers can check the label on the life jacket for user weight and chest size.^{3,4}
- U.S. Federal law requires children 13 years and younger to wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket when a vessel is in motion; however, the age requirement varies by state.^{2,3}
- Adult supervision is still needed when children are wearing life jackets.⁴
- Adults can model water safety behavior by wearing life jackets themselves.⁴

Things to know about life jacket use

- In the United States, recreational boats are required to have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket available for every person onboard.^{2,3}
- Many states require the use of an appropriate life jacket while water skiing and operating a personal watercraft.²
- There are different types of life jackets that are designed for different activities. It is important to ensure that life jackets are U.S. Coast Guard-approved and appropriate for the water body and activity.^{2,4}
- Some life jackets need to be tested and maintained routinely. Life jackets should be checked for tears and buoyancy.²

Visit uscgboating.org for information from the U.S. Coast Guard on how to choose the right life jacket, and a summary of life jacket requirements for recreational vessels: [How to Choose the Right Life Jacket Brochure](#)

References

1. U.S. Coast Guard. Coast Guard releases 2023 recreational boating statistics. Published May 28, 2024. <https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/3788966/coast-guard-releases-2023-recreational-boating-statistics/>
2. U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Division. Life Jacket Wear / Wearing your Life Jacket. [uscgboating.org. https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/life-jacket-wear-wearing-your-life-jacket.php](https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/life-jacket-wear-wearing-your-life-jacket.php)
3. United States Coast Guard Boating Safety. What's the Difference Between a Life Jacket and a PFD? Published January 11, 2024. <https://www.boatingsafetymag.com/safety-tips/whats-the-difference-between-a-life-jacket-and-a-pfd/>
4. Healthy Children.org. Life Jackets & Life Preservers for Children. Published April 14, 2022. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Life-Jackets-and-Life-Preservers.aspx>