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## Open Water Swimming Poses Special Risks for Drowning: International Task Force Sets Guidelines

*Monday, June 20, Brewster, NY*—The first hot and humid days have arrived and there's likely to be many more. With the changing seasons, more youngsters and adults will be heading to the water to cool off. While swimming pools present serious risks of course, especially with young children, open water has a host of unique dangers that put pre-teens through adults at jeopardy. Drowning in open water is such a major concern around the world that a set of guidelines for families and individuals was developed last year by an international task force.

First, what is open water and why is it dangerous? Open-water swimming takes place in outdoor bodies of water such as lakes, rivers, oceans, bays and even man-made structures such as canals and reservoirs, all of which may present hidden dangers. Lakes and rivers are particularly hazardous before summer. Lifeguards are usually not yet on duty and rivers are colder, and run higher and swifter, than later in the summer. Rivers in particular are perilous because the currents and bottom change—with new pieces of submerged wood or rocks that can present problems. Lakes possess unseen risks as well. Cold, deep, dark waters conceal vegetation that can accidentally entrap a swimmer or diver.

Key tips for open-water swimming include:

- **Know the water.** Do not venture into open water (lakes, rivers, ocean, etc.) without knowing the possible dangers linked to the site's water and weather conditions.
- **Know your limits.** Drowning often happens when a person swims and gets too tired. Learn to swim, float and tread water, but don't overestimate your abilities.
- **Select sites with lifeguards and always swim with a buddy.**
- **For children: Never leave them unattended** while swimming in open water or at a pool. **Avoid all distractions**, such as talking on the phone or reading.

The complete *International Open Water Drowning Prevention Guidelines*, in both English or Spanish, are available at the Health Department's website at [www.putnamcountyny.com](http://www.putnamcountyny.com).

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