



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Personal Flotation Device (PFD) (Life Jacket)  
Fact Sheet



## The Fit is It!

When selecting life jackets this camp season, keep in mind they must be sized appropriately in order to fit properly. Read the label to determine size and weight restrictions. Life jackets should be adjusted to fit snugly. To determine this, with the life jacket on the child, lift the shoulders of the life jacket; it's too big if there is more than three inches between the shoulders of the wearer and the device, or if the device slips over the chin or ears. The use of straps between the legs is an important feature on life jackets for small children, it will keep the jacket from floating off in the water.

## Check Life Jackets in the Beginning of the Season

Check flotation characteristics at the beginning of each camp season. Depending on materials, care and use, there is a potential for buoyancy loss. To test, fit the jacket to the wearer and have them walk gradually into the water until it completely supports the wearer. If the PFD floats the person's head and shoulders out of the water and feels comfortable, the device is still usable.

Check the life jacket materials for wear and tear, pulling seams, straps and buckles for strength. Kapok filled jackets should be checked for air leaks/moisture, which can cause the Kapok to deteriorate and lose buoyancy. **Discard when in doubt.**

Dry life jackets after use and store out of the sun, away from chemicals such as gasoline or oil.

## What Type is Right?

The following types of life jackets are all accepted as meeting the life jacket requirements for NYS children's camps. Look for the United States Coast Guard (USCG) approval and type on the label.

- Type I - Offshore Life Jacket: Designed for large, rough waters where rescue may not be prompt and to turn most unconscious wearers face up. These PFDs are most often found on commercial crafts, they tend to be bulky.
- Type II - Near Shore Buoyant Vest: Less bulky and providing less flotation than Type I, these vests are for use in calm inland waters where there is a chance of fast rescue; vest will turn some wearers face up.



## PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH Personal Flotation Device (PFD) (Life Jacket) Fact Sheet



- Type III - Flotation Aids: Generally the most comfortable type of life jacket. This type includes many activity specific designs (i.e. water skiing, fishing, sailing, etc.), so be sure to check the label. They are not designed to turn the unconscious wearer face up, but will keep the wearer upright in the water.
- Type V – Special Use Hybrids: A Type V is any approved device designed for specific and restricted use. The specific approved use of a Type V jacket and any restricted or limitations will be described on the device label. Some Type V PFDs are, under certain conditions, approved as a replacement for a Type III or other device, usually with the provision that they be worn at all times.
- Inflatable PFDs: The USCG does approve inflatable PFDs for use on recreational vessels; however, they are not allowed for non-swimmers, water skiers, youth under the age of 16 or riders of personal watercraft. Inflatable PFDs require the user to pay careful attention to the condition of the device. Inflatable PFDs must have a full cylinder and all status indicators on the inflator must be green, or the device is not acceptable. The wearer must also read the approval label to determine if it is suitable for the water activity being conducted.
- Belt pack inflatable PFDs: These are Type V life jackets with Type III performance because the inflated chamber must be slipped over the head. The wearer must be conscious in order to place the jacket over the head.
- Hybrid (Foam & Inflation): Hybrid PFDs can be used by swimmers & non-swimmers. This form of PFD comes with a foam-padded vest with an inflatable bladder, sort of a Type III and an inflatable Type V. As with all other types of PFDs they come in Adult, Youth, and Child sizes. The USCG approval is for wearable styles only; they must be worn to be considered an approved device. The wearer must also read the approval label to determine if this type of PFD is suitable for the water activity they are participating in. Some are designed for specific water sports.