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Countywide Efforts to Prevent Drownings at Public and Private Swimming Pools

Although swimming is a healthy and enjoyable exercise activity, especially during the warm summer months, tragedy can strike quickly and quietly. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death for children aged 1-4 and second for those under 14. To avoid unnecessary heartache for children and families, preventing drowning deaths, especially for children, is a critical priority for Los Angeles County.

Children die every day nationally from drowning. For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency department care for nonfatal drowning injuries that can result in severe brain damage and long-term disabilities. According to the California Department of Developmental Services, treatment for these disabilities costs roughly \$30,000 per month.

Fortunately, there are many steps that can be taken to help prevent or reduce the number of drowning events at public and private swimming pools. Having active supervision of pool users is critical to quickly identify any swimmer in distress or child

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who remains submerged. Teaching children how to swim at an early age also helps reduce the risk of drowning.

Where present, lifeguards help reduce the risk of drownings or injuries at pools by supervising the activity of pool users, responding to swimmers in distress, and administering first aid or CPR when needed. Under state law, Lifeguard service is required at public pools where a direct fee is charged to use the pool.

The County Code does not require lifeguards at public pools which are utilized by children and non-swimmers or nor does it specify the number of lifeguards required at public pools. Public pools that provide lifeguard service should also create and implement an Aquatic Safety Plan that includes procedures for lifeguard staffing and training and training in CPR and first aid.

When notified of fatal or nonfatal drownings at public pools or public swimming areas, the Department of Public Health (Public Health) will promptly investigate to determine if conditions or lack of required safety equipment or enclosures played a role in the incident so that any deficiencies can be corrected. However, Public Health currently relies on notification by the County's Coroner Office and these notifications are often received days after the drowning incident.

Numerous educational programs exist to help raise awareness of drowning risks and provide simple pool safety tips. Although this type of drowning prevention information can be found on various County department websites and is promoted at the beginning of each swim season, a comprehensive countywide effort to encourage safe swimming is lacking.

In Orange County, a countywide drowning prevention task force was established in 2015 to develop recommendations on methods and strategies to improve drowning

prevention efforts countywide. The task force includes the heads of public health, public safety, and other government bodies; nonprofit leaders; heads of swim schools; drowning victims; and Olympic medal-winning swimmers. A similar group should be convened in Los Angeles County and all efforts must be leveraged to prevent as many drownings as possible.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors directs the Department of Public Health to take the following actions:

- 1) Work with County Counsel to prepare amendments to the County Code for recommendation to the Board, to require all public swimming pools that require lifeguard services, and all children's camps and schools that have a public pool and public swimming areas, to implement Aquatic Safety Plans which include Lifeguard responsibilities, and to require training in CPR and first aid, as defined under Health and Safety Code section 1797.182.
- 2) Work with County Counsel to prepare amendments to the County Code for recommendation to the Board, to require lifeguard service under Health and Safety Code section 116045 at public swimming pools located at children's camps and schools, and identify the number of lifeguards required at public swimming pools and public swimming areas. The proposed amendments should also require the owner or operator of any public swimming pool or public swimming area to immediately notify the Department of Public Health in the event of any fatal or non-fatal drowning incidents so that the Department of Public Health can investigate promptly.
- 3) Make all fatal drowning related data, (but not personally identifiable information) publicly available on a yearly basis.

- 4) ~~Convene a Los Angeles Drowning Prevention Work Group comprised of~~ Consult with representatives from public health, public safety, pediatrics and nonprofit drowning prevention organizations to develop public messaging, educational materials, and promote resources on drowning prevention.

- 5) Provide an initial report back within 60 days on the above efforts, and a follow-up report within 6 months.

WE FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Los Angeles County Fire Department and the Emergency Medical Services Agency of the Department of Health Services to immediately notify the Department of Public Health in the event of any fatal or non-fatal drowning incidents within its jurisdiction so that the Department of Public Health can investigate promptly.

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