

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Contact:

Kerri S. Mabee  
Public Information Officer  
Riverside University Health System  
P: 951.467.7542 | E: [k.mabee@ruhealth.org](mailto:k.mabee@ruhealth.org)

### Contact:

Sean Pravica  
Senior Public Information Specialist  
First 5 Riverside  
P: 951.955.0568 | E: [spravica@rivco.org](mailto:spravica@rivco.org)

## Riverside County Leaders Urge Water Safety Ahead of Memorial Day Weekend

**RIVERSIDE, CA (May 21, 2026)** – Memorial Day is just around the corner and the popular holiday brings the kind of warm weather perfect for water activities. Riverside University Health System (RUHS) and First 5 Riverside County are teaming up to remind the public to use caution whenever they plan to swim, boat or jet ski to prevent drowning and to also consider educational resources for staying safe.

“Some of the best family memories are made around the water, but with young children, we must always stay alert,” said Third District Supervisor Chuck Washington. “Drowning can happen quickly and quietly, and many tragedies can be prevented with the right safety steps. That is why First 5 Riverside County helps families access swim lessons across the county, including self-rescue lessons for babies as young as six months old. We want every child to enjoy the water safely, build confidence, and return home safe after every swim.”

[California Department of Public Health](#) data shows that there were 430 recorded emergency department visits for drowning and submersion injuries among children under 18 in Riverside County between 2020 and 2024. Nearly 84% of those incidents involved children who were younger than 5. The county also recorded 24 child drowning deaths over the same period, with 19 of those being children under 5.

“People often think of drowning as a dramatic event where there’s a lot of flailing and splashing, but really what we see is it can be a silent event. Watching the water is key to knowing when someone is in trouble,” said Dr. Michael Mesisca, Department Chair of

Emergency Medicine for RUHS – Medical Center. “Drownings can happen wherever water is present – whether that’s a lake or something as small as a bucket.”

RUHS recommends the following tips to help prevent drowning-related incidents:

- Get trained in CPR, basic first aid and rescue methods. Add barriers to water sources, such as gates, fences and alarms.
- Assign [a water watcher](#) whenever people are close to water and never allow someone to swim alone.
- Adults who are in or near water should avoid consuming alcohol and medications that can influence judgment, balance, and the ability to swim.
- Enroll children in swim lessons with a certified instructor.
- Wear life jackets when on or near natural water sources.

### **Educational Resources**

Through community partnerships Riverside County has a variety of educational resources across the county intended to help members of the public learn more about how to keep their family, their friends and themselves safe whenever they’re around water.

- Educational Events - Keep an eye out for fairs and similar events. Residents of the Eastern Coachella Valley are encouraged to check out the Mecca Splash Water Safety Fair from 4-7 p.m. June 12 at the Mecca Community Center at 65-250 Coahuilla Street. Multiple organizations and county departments will provide valuable information on water safety. Admission is free.
- First 5 Drowning Prevention – First 5 Riverside County sponsors swimming lessons for children as young as 6 months old up to age 5. Drowning is one of the leading causes of death for young children and among the most preventable. Lessons include one-on-one survival swim lessons as well as group lessons and are held at over 20 locations throughout Riverside County. Families can visit [First5riverside.org](http://First5riverside.org) for more information and to enroll.

“Every parent and caregiver deserves to know there are simple steps they can take before a child is ever in danger,” said First 5 Executive Director Charna Whidby. “At First 5 Riverside County, we help families access swim lessons and practical water safety tools because prevention should happen before a crisis. If this reminder helps even one family sign up for lessons, assign a water watcher, or add another layer of protection around water, it can help save a child’s life.”

For more information or to download a free water watcher tag, visit [www.rivcowatersafety.org](http://www.rivcowatersafety.org).

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### **About Riverside University Health System**

*Riverside University Health System (RUHS) includes a 439-bed Medical Center in Moreno Valley, Calif., 14 Federally Qualified Community Health Centers, and the departments of Public and Behavioral Health. RUHS is Riverside County's safety net provider, offering high-quality, patient-centered care. With more than 8,000 staff members and over 125 years of experience, RUHS continues its commitment to and legacy of delivering exceptional, compassionate care with a focus on public health, behavioral health, community wellness, and medical education. Visit [ruhealth.org](http://ruhealth.org) to learn more.*

### **About First 5 Riverside County**

*First 5 Riverside County, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission, is funded by Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues. First 5 Riverside County supports early childhood development through educational outreach, partnerships and funding for services that benefit children, from prenatal through age 5, their families, and communities. For more information about First 5 Riverside County programs and other funded services, call 800-266-3880 or visit [www.First5Riverside.org](http://www.First5Riverside.org).*