

Drowning in Eeyou Istchee

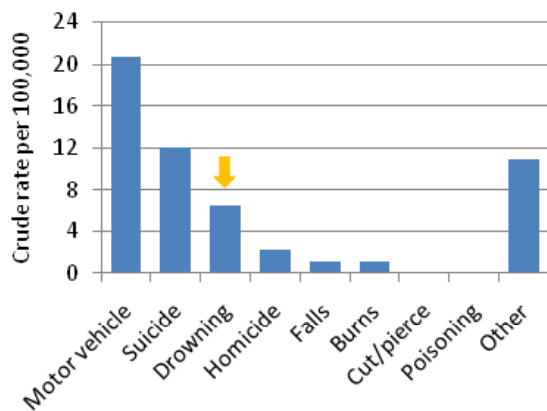
An overview of the death and hospitalization statistics, 1985-2007 AUGUST 2010

*Is drowning a concern in Eeyou Istchee?
Are toddlers drowning in lakes and rivers?
Are snowmobiles going through the ice?
Here is what the statistics tell us about
drownings between 1985 and 2006.*

How big is the problem?

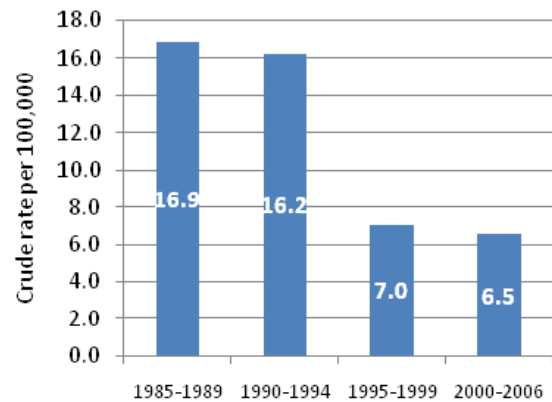
Drowning is still among the top causes of injury death in Eeyou Istchee, although it is less of an issue than motor vehicle crashes or suicide (Figure 1). On average, one person drowns in the region each year. But unlike problems like car crashes, suicide attempts, or assault, submersion causes few or no hospital admissions.

FIGURE 1: INJURY DEATH RATES FROM VARIOUS CAUSES, 2000-2006 (MALES AND FEMALES COMBINED)



Drowning rates have gone down over time, perhaps as people drive more and use boats less. The rate is now about half what it was in the early 1990s (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: DROWNING RATES IN EYYOU ISTCHEE 1985-2006



How do these drownings happen?

We lack details on these drownings, but from what we can see, many of them are boating mishaps rather than swimming ones.

How many people drown when their snowmobiles go through the ice? Such drownings used to be very uncommon: over the entire 1985-2006 period, there was only one such incident. But people in the region report that, since 2006, two people have drowned this way. There are concerns that because of global warming, the old rules of thumb about when it is safe to go on the ice may no longer be right.

Who is at risk of drowning?

In Eeyou Istchee, males are at much higher risk of drowning than females. Twenty-four of the 25 people who drowned between 1985 and 2006 were males.

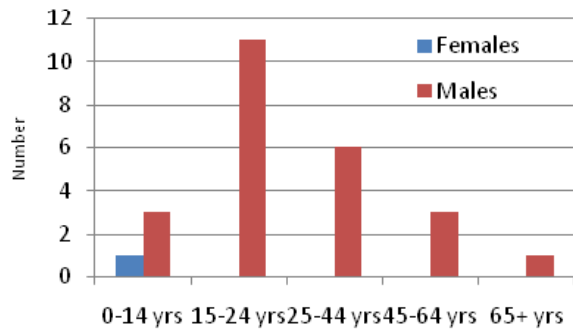
Teenagers and young men are at special risk. Almost half the people who drowned were between the ages of 15 and 24 (Figure 3).

Surprisingly, rates of drowning are similar in the Coastal and Inland areas.



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Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF DROWNING DEATHS IN EYYOU ISTCHEE BETWEEN 1985 AND 2006, BY AGE GROUP AND SEX



What helps to prevent drowning?

There are some ways you can protect yourself and your family against drowning.

SWIMMING AND PLAYING NEAR WATER

- ◆ Children and adults should learn to swim.
- ◆ Young children should be watched whenever they are near water. You may also want to give them a lifejacket to wear.

SNOWMOBILES

If you need to travel over the ice on a snowmobile, you can protect yourself and others by...

- ◆ Measuring the ice thickness first, or speaking with someone who did measure it.
- ◆ Seeking advice on ice and snow conditions from someone experienced.
- ◆ Wearing a floater suit. If you don't have a floater suit, wear a lifejacket over a regular skidoo suit.
- ◆ Skidooning with someone else, not alone.
- ◆ Carrying a throw rope and survival gear, so you can help the other person if they go through the ice.¹



ADULT BOATERS

If you are an adult boater, you can protect yourself by...

- ◆ Avoiding alcohol.
- ◆ Checking the weather before you set out.
- ◆ Observing load limits—not overloading the boat.
- ◆ Having a lifejacket for every person on board, and being sure to wear it if the water is cold. Cold water makes your muscles weak, and may make it hard to put on a lifejacket.
- ◆ Wearing a floater suit (survival suit) if the water is very cold.²
- ◆ Obtaining your Boat Safety certificate. (Contact the Cree Trappers' Association for courses.)

About these statistics

The statistics in this factsheet are drawn from a larger report called *Injuries in Eeyou Istchee: Analysis of Mortality and Hospitalization Statistics 1985-2007*. They are based on mortality records for the years 1985 to 2006, and hospitalization records for the fiscal years 1987-88 to 2007-08. The report was prepared for the Public Health Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay.

References

1. Auer, Anna (2002). *Working together to reduce snowmobiling injuries*. Unpublished document prepared for the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada.
2. Canadian Red Cross (2003). *What we have learned: 10 years of pertinent facts about drownings and other water-related injuries in Canada, 1991-2000*. Ottawa: Canadian Red Cross Society.

Copies of this factsheet may be found at:
<http://www.creehealth.org>