



Lifeguards are needed, and for more reasons than you might realize!

The pandemic has changed the world and affected us all in many ways. As we gradually come out of it, it is crucial that we address critical areas that have fallen in priority during this challenging time.

One of these critical areas is the current shortage of lifeguards. While there may be many reasons for the shortage, that doesn't diminish how integral they are to so many summer activities and most significantly, water safety.

If there aren't enough lifeguards this summer, it will create a ripple effect on numerous water-related businesses and jobs. Parks will not be able to run all of their slides, community pools will not open and, swim lessons will not be taught.

Lisa Zarda, Executive Director of United States Swim School Association, revealed that "According to a recent survey conducted among our members, more than 77,000 children are no longer receiving swim lessons due to COVID-19."

As a result of this potential gap in sufficient lifeguard staffing, the Aquatics Coalition is concerned about the possible increase in drownings because of a reduction in the availability of swim lessons.

Why become a lifeguard? Not only does being a lifeguard look great on a resume, but the job skills developed while in the position will be utilized for life.

Becoming a lifeguard is more than a just a job. The confidence, leadership, and teamwork skills developed are transferable for any career path.

"Lifeguarding is one of the most rewarding jobs," said Jill White, Founder of Starfish Aquatics Institute. "Whether as a first-time seasonal job, a full-time career, or part-time later in life, a lifeguard is making a difference in saving lives every day."

A lifeguard both understands and reduces the risks and hazards at aquatic venues (pools, water parks, beaches), a benefit for swimmers of all ages. They are highly trained in emergency procedures and are able to stay focused on the water as they scan it.

"The CPR and first aid learned through the lifeguard certification process also makes you a value to your community in the event of *any* emergency. Nearly 45% of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest victims survived when bystander CPR was administered. The more people that know CPR,

the more lives that are saved," as stated by Dr. Lisa Blackwell, Medical Advisor to the Aquatics Coalition.

Many assume that people who are drowning are easy to identify; yelling or waving their arms. This isn't often the case. Someone who is drowning usually struggles to keep their mouth above the surface of the water to breathe, so they are rarely audible and are not able to flail their arms high.

Lifeguards are essential for these reasons. They are the eyes and the ears for water safety.

Studies at flat beaches have revealed that non-swimming adults usually struggle on the surface of the water for about 60 seconds, while infants and small children can submerge in as little as 20 seconds. This inability of a swimmer in trouble to call or wave for help in the short period before submerging emphasizes the need for lifeguards as a source of continuous surveillance and immediate, life-saving action.

When asked about the most common misconception of their work, some lifeguards we spoke with said most people think their job starts and ends in the summer. "What the public may not realize," one lifeguard said, "is although we do have part-time positions, there are many full-time positions available throughout the year."

"When swim instructors, water exercise coaches, therapists and swim coaches work with their clients, they are focused on them and not what is going on around the pool environment. This is why we need lifeguards, because they're supervising the entire pool venue," said Sue Nelson, Total Aquatic Programming, LLC

When we do open activities this summer, there are protocols in place to keep lifeguards and pool patrons as safe as possible. The entire aquatics industry is working towards a successful return to safe water activities and with your help and support in creating awareness around this issue, we can make that happen.

For more information, please reach out to your local lifeguard provider.