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For Immediate Release

DuPage County Health Department Welcomes U.S. Olympian Matt Grevers for Water Safety Event on Protect Swimmers Day Thursday, July 20, 2023

DuPage County - On Protect Swimmers Day, there is one focus, to keep children safer near water. Residents are urged to prioritize water safety and take steps to protect children from drowning.

On July 20th, DuPage County Health Department (DCHD) brought together, organizations, businesses, swimming facilities, and Olympic Swimmer Matt Grevers to raise community awareness about child and adolescent drowning risk factors and preventive strategies.

Matt Grevers is a four-time Olympic gold medalist and has been one of the fastest men in water for the past 20 years. He won four NCAA titles for Northwestern University and closed out his collegiate career as a 27-time All-American. He qualified for his first Olympic team in 2008 and has won a cumulative 35 medals (16 gold, 13 silver, 6 bronze) in major international competitions throughout his illustrious career and is Northwestern University’s most decorated Olympian of all time.

“In 2022, 15 Illinois children fatally drowned in swimming pools and open water and according to recent media reports, four Illinois children lost their lives to accidental drowning already this summer,” said Adam Forker, Executive Director, DuPage County Health Department. “We need to keep children safer near water. Together, we can prevent child drowning – on Protect Swimmers Day and all year long.”

DuPage County Health Department’s Protect Swimmers 10M (PS10M) Community Awareness Initiative works to prevent child drowning and suction drain entrapment through community awareness-raising activities and professional trainings.

Drowning continues to be a leading cause of unintentional death for children ages 1-14. Children under the age of five are more likely to drown in backyard pools, while children over the age of six are more likely to drown in open water. Last year in Illinois, fatal drownings involving children occurred in backyard pools, retention ponds, rivers, small lakes, and Lake Michigan. Drowning can happen anytime, including when children are not expected to be near water, such as when they gain unsupervised access to pools.

Adult caregivers are urged to practice the following water safety steps to prevent drowning:

• Teach children to swim and to self-rescue. Important skills include learning how to keep your nose and mouth above water, how to propel forward, how to exit the water, and how to float to self-rescue in deep water or strong currents. Children of all ages must be taught not to enter the water unless a focused adult is nearby.
• Make sure pools and hot tubs you use have Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act (VGBA) - compliant suction outlet drain covers. Swimmers should keep their bodies, fingers and toes, hair, and straps away from suction outlets in pools.

• Prevent children from accessing the water by using layers of protection. This includes 4-foot fencing around all four sides of pools, self-locking gates, door alarms, and pool motion sensors. Fencing is very important if your home’s back door opens to a pool or spa.

• Wear life jackets in open water. When swimming or boating in open water, all swimmers should wear a life jacket and avoid powerful currents.

In 2021, DCHD was awarded a second federal grant from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Through the Protect Swimmers 10M initiative, DCHD aims to prevent child drowning through regional education, awareness, and professional training.

Visit dupagehealth.org for more information.

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