

## THINKFIRST CANADA'S SAILING INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

In 2000 Canada was reported to have 3.5 million recreational boats, with almost 20% of them in British Columbia. Sailing injuries result from lack of proper safety equipment, alcohol consumption, inexperience, carelessness, and bad weather conditions. Here are ThinkFirst Canada's top tips for reducing your risk of sustaining a catastrophic injury while sailing. This information is taken from Chapter 7 "Sailing" in the ThinkFirst book entitled *Catastrophic Injuries in Sports and Recreation: Causes and Prevention – A Canadian Study* edited by Charles H. Tator and published by the University of Toronto Press in 2008.



### TOP TIPS:

#### What to wear:

- Wear a properly fitted personal flotation device (PFD) at all times, rather than simply keeping it on board the boat. Once someone falls into the water, it is very difficult to put on a PFD properly.
- Shoes must be worn to protect feet from falling objects and other possible injury. Special sailing boots can be purchased.
- For protection from the sun always wear sunglasses, a hat, and sun block. This will also help maintain visibility.

- If sailing in cold and wet conditions, wear warm dry layers of clothing and a windproof jacket to help prevent heat loss and hypothermia. If sailing in the spring or autumn, consider wearing a hypothermia-protective flotation garment.

#### Before sailing:

- Check the boat to ensure that it is in good working order.
- Check the weather forecast and the wind strength. If the wind exceeds 30km/hour, only experienced sailors should be on the water.
- Check the people you are sailing with about their ability to swim, about their level of strength, and physical fitness. Ask if they have any special medical conditions or allergies.
- Assign someone to be the lookout for possible obstructions and environmental problems.
- Discuss the possibility of boom strikes with the crew. Decide who will call the 'jibing' and 'tacking' and practice ducking your heads to avoid the boom. Some experts recommend that helmets be worn to protect sailors during boom strikes.

#### General Safety:

- Avoid alcohol consumption to maintain proper judgment, reaction time, and body temperature. Alcohol interferes with an individual's ability to properly operate a sailboat and increases the risk of hypothermia. The legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit in boating is 80mg%.
- The boat operator should have taken a boating safety course and should have experience operating a sailboat, especially if others on board are inexperienced sailors.
- As of September 15, 2009 all operators of powered boats in Canada must have the Pleasure Craft Operator Card.
- When possible, sail with other passengers, as there is safety in numbers.
- A rope should be towed behind the boat in case someone falls overboard, they can pull themselves back up.
- Practice 'man overboard' procedures to maximize recovery strategies.
- Think ahead about the management of acute medical conditions on board such as heart attacks.
- Stay hydrated. Dehydration can produce disorientation and increase the risk of injury.
- Try to sail within sight of others.
- Keep a working radio and first aid kit on board the boat.
- Check for changing weather conditions regularly.

**Remember: [thinkfirst.ca](http://thinkfirst.ca) before you play!**