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NORTHJERSEY.COM

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Swim instructors stress importance of supervision near pools, lakes, ocean

Matt Kadosh North Jersey Record | USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

A pair of drownings this summer — an 87-year-old man in Fair Lawn and a 7-year-old boy in Montclair — has underscored the necessity of safe swimming.

About one in five people who die from drowning in the United States are age 14 or younger, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And for every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency care for nonfatal submersion injuries, CDC figures show.

"We really have learned over the years how close supervision is needed," said Dr. Peter Wernicki, who chairs the aquatics committee of the American Red Cross' Scientific Advisory Council, which develops data-based swim safety recommendations. "If you have a young swimmer or learning swimmer, we recommend they be in arm's reach."

There were 10 drownings in New Jersey last year, most of which were due to ocean rip currents.

"Drownings happen quickly, quietly, silently and in the best of families," said Judith Josephs, who is the education chairwoman for the aquatics section of the New Jersey Parks and Recreation Association.

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On the Web

Watch Paterson kids learn swimming skills at NorthJersey.com

Children swim laps with the help of lifeguards at the Paterson Boys & Girls Club on Tuesday.

DANIELLE PARHIZKARAN/NORTHJERSEY

Swim safety tips

The American Red Cross offers the following tips:

- Adults should actively supervise children and stay within arm's reach of young children and newer swimmers.
- Ensure everyone in the family learns to swim well, knows their limitations and recognizes and avoids water hazards.
- Learn how to help prevent and respond to emergencies.
- Enclose your pool in with 4-sided fencing that is at least 4 feet high and use self-closing, self-latching gates.
- Swim as a pair near a lifeguard's chair. Everyone, including experienced swimmers, should swim with a buddy in areas protected by lifeguards.
- If in a location with no lifeguards, such as a residential pool, designate a person to keep a close eye on children in and around the water.

NJ TRANSIT

Atlantic City line shutting down

Staff to be used elsewhere in state

Curtis Tate North Jersey Record USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

NJ Transit plans to shut down the Atlantic City Line for five months starting Sept. 4 and redeploy its personnel and equipment to deal with shortages of both elsewhere in the state.

The plan, which was described in an internal email obtained by the USA TODAY NETWORK New Jersey, shows the struggles of the statewide public transportation system.

It has struggled to meet a year-end federal deadline to install positive train control, a collision-avoidance system. It has also not hired enough people in recent years to make up for the departure of experienced workers for better-paying jobs or retirement.

The email also indicated that Raritan Valley Line trains would not operate into New York Penn Station during off-peak hours. Riders who need to get to New York will have to transfer to

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Delayed Beyoncé show helps stall morning commute

Jai Agnish North Jersey Record USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

It turns out Thursday night's Beyoncé and Jay-Z concert at MetLife Stadium was partly to blame for this morning's cancellation of nearly 20 trains across several NJ Transit lines. This is according to a New Jersey Transit spokeswoman, who said that engineer absences due to concert obligations were part of this morning's rail commuting headaches.

Nancy Snyder said equipment installation pulled engineers away and that the "previous administration's failure to adequately fund NJ Transit" has created challenges.

NJ Transit is contractually obligated to support concerts with rail service when attendance is more than 50,000, explained Snyder.

"Due to inclement weather, last night's concert started later than usual and ended very early this morning, forcing crews to work until close to 3:30 a.m. today," she said. "As a result, some of these crews did not have the required rest time to begin their scheduled shifts this morning."

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Assembly speaker supports NJ marijuana legalization

Mike Davis Asbury Park Press USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

New Jersey legal weed advocates just got a major supporter on their side.

Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, D-Middlesex, on Friday said he was in favor of making New Jersey the 10th state to legalize marijuana for adult use.

Until recently, Coughlin had been less enthusiastic about the prospects of New Jersey marijuana legalization than Gov. Phil Murphy and Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, both of whom have called for legalization.



Craig J. Coughlin

"For folks who don't want to legalize it, I understand their view. But I would ask, are we satisfied with the status quo," Coughlin said on his regular "Speak to the Speaker" radio segment on WCTC 1450 AM.

"Use of marijuana is still a constant. Three out of five drug arrests are for marijuana. African Americans are three times more likely to get arrested for marijuana."

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COMING SUNDAY

Pot patrol

Marijuana users in New Jersey are arrested at the highest rate in the nation by local police departments, a USA TODAY NETWORK New Jersey investigation found.

Rift in Republican Party widens

President Donald Trump's feud with Charles Koch became deeper as the GOP chair joined the fray. 4A

Grewal to skip radio meeting

New Jersey State Attorney General Gurbir Grewal will skip meeting with NJ 101.5 employees after Sikh incident. 1L

Weather today

High 84° || Low 73°
Mostly cloudy with occasional downpours.

Weather tomorrow

High 90° || Low 72°
Hot with clouds and sun. Forecast. 2A



Safety

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Starting young

Brian McLaughlin, the head coach for the men's and women's swimming teams at Montclair State University and the school's assistant director of athletics, encourages parents to start with swim lessons as early as 2 years old.

As families become busy with specialized sports, McLaughlin said, they sometimes don't realize that learning basic swimming skills is more important than learning the average sport, because it is a safety issue.

"There are so many swim programs that are available to families in this area," McLaughlin said. "It's important for parents to carve out the time, at least for the developmental years of their children, to take swim lessons because once a person becomes comfortable in the water, that usually will not go away."

This week in Paterson, aquatic skills were taught as part of a four-day program sponsored by the Connecticut-based nonprofit ZAC Foundation, a national group that brings water safety lessons to children ages 5 to 9 in urban environments, such as Paterson and Passaic.

"Studies show that children who do not have access to water are so much more likely to drown," said Wendy McGuire, the deputy executive director for the Boys & Girls Club of Paterson and Passaic, which is hosting the foundation's lessons in North Jersey. "But once they have that skill they will pass that on to future generations."

This year, Josephs said, her foremost concern is preventing drownings in residential and hotel pools, where there is no state requirement for a lifeguard to be present.

"The New Jersey bathing code is tough on public pools, but it has no bearing on backyard pools," Josephs said. "It has to meet the building code, but once they're inspected nobody goes back to check them."

And Wernicki, of the Red Cross, said that when it comes to flotation devices, it is best to stick with Coast Guard approved life vests.

"Inner tubes, floaty things and rafts are probably more dangerous than not having them because kids use them and get into the deep water, or out into the ocean, and now they're over their heads," he said.

Get off the phone

In Millburn, Bob Hogan, director of



Kayla McFarland, center, enjoys the pool at the Paterson Boys & Girls Club on Tuesday. The ZAC Foundation hosted the camp to teach children about water safety.



Girls from the 7-year-old age group wait their turn to swim laps at the Paterson Boys & Girls Club on Tuesday. PHOTOS BY DANIELLE PARHIZKARAN/NORTHJERSEY

the township's Recreation Department, which runs a municipal pool at Gero Park, has seen more parents gabbing on the phone instead of attending to their children.

"I know there is WiFi and a lot of computer use," Hogan said. "But when you have to watch your kids, you have to adjust how much you use the phone."

Parents with multiple children, he said, should prioritize staying with their children who are the least skilled swimmers.

Lifeguards aren't enough

In Verona, where a lifeguard saved a

12-year-old from nearly drowning in the town's pool last year, Jim Cunningham, director of Community Services, also is asking parents to help the lifeguards.

"Whether it's at a pool, ocean lake, wherever you are, there is a [misunderstanding] that when the lifeguards are there, you don't need to keep your eyes out," said Cunningham, who noted up to 1,000 people visit Verona's town pool on a busy day.

In the majority of near-drownings, including last year's in Verona, spectators spotted victims and alerted a lifeguard, Cunningham said, citing figures provided by the municipality's insurance provider.

When on beaches

■ Wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket when on a boat and if you're in a situation beyond your skill level.

■ If you plan to swim in the ocean, a lake or river, be aware that swimming in these environments is different than swimming in a pool and ensure you have the skills for these environments.

■ Swim only at a beach with a lifeguard, within the designated swimming area. Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards and ask them about local conditions.

■ Swim sober and with a buddy. Know your limitations and make sure you have enough energy to swim back to shore.

■ Don't dive headfirst. Walk carefully into open waters. Watch out for and avoid aquatic life.

■ If you are caught in a rip current, try not to panic and don't fight the current. Signal to those on shore that you need assistance.

■ Swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the rip current. Once you are free, swim toward shore. If you can't swim to the shore, float or tread water until you are free of the rip current and then head toward shore.

New Jersey Health Department figures released in May for the years 2006 through 2016 show 630 drowning deaths statewide. They are the most recent statewide figures available from the Health Department, a spokeswoman said.

What about 'dry drownings'?

There is one issue parents do not have to worry about: so-called "dry drownings," Wernicki said.

"If your child has some respiratory problems in the water, if they actually just come back to normal and they're fine and they're happy and they're not coughing, wheezing, short of breath or loopy, then they're going to be fine," Wernicki said.

If the child is having respiratory issues, common sense should prevail, he said.

"If they're not getting better, you take them to the emergency room and they'll be fine," Wernicki said. "Everybody needs to calm down."

Email: kadosh@northjersey.com

Line

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other trains at Newark Penn Station.

The Atlantic City Line carried 800,000 riders in 2016, down from 1 million in 2014. It connects Philadelphia's 30th Street Station with Atlantic City's casinos and resorts.

'Summer of Hell 2'

Though Gov. Phil Murphy was elected on a promise to restore NJ Transit, and state lawmakers have given the agency more funding, years of neglect have caught up.

More than a dozen trains were canceled Friday morning on multiple lines due to staffing and equipment issues.

The summer was already difficult for NJ Transit commuters, as the agency cut back several train schedules starting in June to accommodate work on positive train control.

Last year, NJ Transit redirected a number of trains from Midtown to Hoboken Terminal to accommodate Amtrak's emergency track repair project in New York's Penn Station.

The change forced commuters to use

PATH trains or NY Waterway ferries to reach Manhattan. This summer, PATH trains have not always been a reliable alternative, as that railroad has experienced difficulties related to its installation of positive train control.

Compounding the problem, NJ Transit has hired few locomotive engineers since 2015 in comparison with its regional peers. A number of experienced engineers have left the agency for better-paying jobs at Amtrak and Metro-North. Others have reached retirement age or soon will.

Additionally, summer is a popular time for train crews to take time off.

From March to June, NJ Transit had replaced midday Atlantic City trains with buses to accommodate track and signal work.

In a public announcement following an inquiry by the USA TODAY NETWORK New Jersey, NJ Transit said it would discount Atlantic City rail passes by 25 percent and cross-honor rail tickets on bus route 554 and the PATCO rail line.

The agency said it would make detailed bus and rail schedules available in the coming days.

The Federal Railroad Administration has expressed concern that the agency wouldn't make the Dec. 31 deadline for

the completion of positive train control.

The National Transportation Safety Board concluded that such a system could have avoided two deadly derailments in the region, on Metro-North in the Bronx in 2013 and Amtrak in Philadelphia in 2015.

In both cases, the trains approached curves far faster than they were permitted to travel.

Positive train control automatically slows or stops trains as they approach curves or stop signals. It is also designed to protect track maintenance workers during train operations.

The agency has begun to catch up on the effort in recent months, and is taking steps to qualify for a two-year extension from federal regulators.

"We regret the inconvenience this will cause our customers," said Kevin Corbett, the agency's executive director. "As we push to complete PTC installation, I ask for customers' patience during this process as the end result is a safer railroad for everyone."

Riders react

South Jersey commuters on the NJ Transit platform at PATCO's Lindenwood station were surprised by the news.

Patricia Capilato said she'll need to figure out a new way to get around for the next several months.

"It's very annoying because I don't drive and I actually live down the shore on weekends, so I'll have to find another way to get there," the 61-year-old Cherry Hill resident said.

Jose Chirino, 32, of Stratford, was bouncing his young son on his lap as he waited for the train to Atlantic City for some time on the beach.

"I think it will be difficult for a lot of people without the train and it will take a lot longer," he said.

The increased commute time has 22-year-old Nicole Fiore considering other travel options.

"I'll probably take me a lot longer and I'll probably get someone to pick me up sometimes," instead, said Fiore, who splits time between Philadelphia and the shore.

Maxine Hardy, 57, of Lawnside, isn't looking forward to the changes.

"That's not too good," she said while waiting for the train for some boardwalk and casino time. "I will miss the train because when I get on it I feel more relaxed than on buses."

Staff writers Carol Comegno and Julia Marnin of the Courier Post contributed to this story.

Commute

Continued from Page 1A

She said more than 12,000 customers were transported to and from MetLife Stadium Thursday night and early Friday.

Severe weather caused a delay at the show in East Rutherford as stadium officials asked fans to leave their seats and take shelter inside. Fans were let back in at about 10:35 p.m.

The concert finally began shortly after 11 p.m. and Beyoncé thanked the crowd for waiting.

Also to blame for the morning commute delays was ongoing work on ad-

vance positive train control equipment, and PATH lines were delayed because of signal failures. As of late Friday morning most trains were back on schedule.

Snyder said NJ Transit has taken steps to address these issues by recruiting and training more engineers.

"We anticipate a class graduating within the next week that will add nine engineers to the roster," she said.

The number of classes has been increased from two to four to qualify new engineers, she added.

Snyder said that a historic funding increase under Gov. Phil Murphy will restore NJ Transit as a national leader in public transportation. She said the PTC project has ramped up in the last three months the completion percent-

age has increased from 13 percent to 52 percent.

"The governor's budget also allows us to staff other critical positions, like bus operators, and we're expanding our recruiting efforts to fill positions across the organization," she said. "It's going to take some time to undo nearly a decade of under-investing, but we're wholly committed to NJ Transit's success and already starting to see movement in the right direction."

Staff writers Joshua Jongsma and Kaitlyn Kanzler contributed to this report.

Follow Jai Agnish on Twitter: @JaiAgnish. Email: agnish@northjersey.com



Jay-Z and Beyoncé performed at MetLife Stadium on Thursday, August 2, 2018. RAVEN VARONA/PARKWOOD ENTERTAINMENT