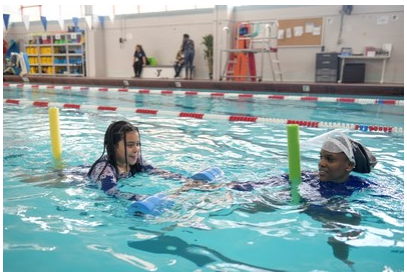
"Swim Safely Boston" Expands Critical Lifeguard Training and Equitable Access to Swim Lessons for 900 Youth and Adults

The City of Boston, Greater Boston YMCA, Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA and Columbia Threadneedle Investments Boston Triathlon partner to increase water safety in Boston communities

BOSTON, July 12, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- To prevent youth drownings and ensure local families can enjoy a safe summer in the water, the City of Boston, the Greater Boston YMCA, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and Columbia Threadneedle Investments Boston Triathlon have partnered to expand the Swim Safely Boston program to provide free training for 60 lifeguards and free swim lessons for 900 youth and adults. To date, the program has already trained 30 lifeguards and provided free swim lessons for 700 youth and adults.



The Swim Safely Boston partnership launched in 2021 in response to the tragic rise of drownings in Greater Boston. The initiative increases swim safety by providing free lifeguard training and job placement for Boston teenagers, which is imperative to operating safe pools and swimming facilities across the city. The program also expands access to swimming lessons, especially for those who have faced historic and economic barriers, by offering free swim lessons to children and adults at nine YMCAs across Boston and at the Umana Boston Public School in East Boston.

"This summer, all Boston residents should feel safe and confident at our pools and beaches," said Mayor Michelle Wu. "I am grateful for the leadership of the YMCA of Greater Boston and support from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts and Columbia Threadneedle Investments Boston Triathlon for their help providing critical lifeguard training and expanding access to swim lesson to Bostonians who have historically not had the opportunities to enjoy the water."

Nationwide, drowning is the leading cause of death in children aged one to four and the second leading cause of accidental death in children aged one to fourteen. Black children ages 10-14 are more than seven times more likely to drown than white children of the same age, according to the CDC.

Economic inequities also persist. A 2017 report commissioned by USA Swimming found that in families with an annual household income below $50,000, 79 percent of children have little or no swimming ability.

"Swim lessons save lives, and it is part of the mission of The YMCA of Greater Boston to improve community health and demand equity for all," said James Morton, president and CEO, YMCA of Greater Boston. "We are excited to join with civic and business leaders in this program to meet the growing community need to train lifeguards and teach hundreds of children and adults how to swim so that they can safely enjoy the water as summer arrives and temperatures rise."

The YMCA is focused on increasing the lifeguard workforce by providing free training and certification in collaboration with BPS high schools. These trainings provide an excellent opportunity for youth employment in the city, while also ensuring the safety of Boston area pools and waterfront spaces.

"Providing water safety education to the community is a public health imperative, and we are proud to support Swim Safely Boston so community members can enjoy the health benefits of water recreation," said Jeff Bellows, vice president of corporate citizenship and public affairs at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. "Swimming is a great way to exercise and keep cool in the warm summer months, and this program eliminates the barriers of access and education so that people across the city can safely enjoy our local pools and beaches."

As "America's swim instructor," the YMCA teaches children of all ages from all backgrounds that water should be fun, not feared, if you know how to be safe. Swim Safely Boston instructors emphasize cultural competency, including hosting community conversations led by the Boston Harbor Women of Color Coalition and the provision of Soul Caps, specially designed swim caps for natural hair, to program participants.

"One of the main objectives of the Swim Safely program is to lower racial and economic barriers to lessons and help people of color become comfortable with swimming as part of an effort to reduce swimming accidents," said Michael O'Neil, President of the Boston Triathlon. "We also hope it will spark a love of swimming and an interest in triathlon for those who may never have considered it if they hadn't been given the opportunity to receive swim training and education."

Classes are forming now and interested members of the community should reach out to secure a spot. For more information about the Swim Safely partnership, to receive swim lesson sign-up information, or to learn more about lifeguard training, please email swim@boston.gov.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts:

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.org) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable and equitable health care with an unparalleled consumer experience. Consistent with our promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

SOURCE Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

For further information: Amy McHugh, amy.mchugh@bcbsma.com

Additional assets available online: Photos (1)

MASSACHUSETTS