Methodology

This survey was conducted between April 17 and 20, 2014 using ORC International’s Online CARAVAN omnibus survey.

The study was conducted among a national sample of 1,024 American adults, including 201 parents of children aged 4-17. The total sample is balanced to be representative of the US adult population in terms of age, sex, geographic region, race and education. The margin of error for the total sample of 1,024 adults is ±3.1%; the margin of error for the sample of 201 parents is ±6.9%.

Throughout this report, significant differences between subgroups are indicated by *.
While the majority of Americans say they can swim…

Subgroup Breakouts
Gender:
- Men are significantly more likely than women to report that they know how to swim (84% vs. 78%).

Age:
- Americans aged 35-44 (86%) and 45-54 (85%) are significantly more likely than those 25-34 (74%) or 65+ (75%) to report they know how to swim.

Swimming lessons:
- Only 8% of those who have taken swimming lessons say they cannot swim.

Region:
- Suburban residents are significantly more likely than those in urban areas to report that they can swim (85% vs. 78%).

Q1: Do you know how to swim?

31% of African Americans
16% of whites

While one in five can't swim, just 2% expect to take swimming lessons this summer.

69% of African Americans
84% of whites

Can swim 80%
Cannot swim 20%
...only 56% of those who say they can swim can perform all five basic water safety skills

Q2: For each of the following, please indicate if it is something you can or cannot do or if you are not sure.
Base: 851 who say they know how to swim
80% have water activities in their summer plans

Q6: Which, if any, of the following water activities do you expect to participate in this summer?

- Go to the beach: 55%
- Go to a hotel or resort pool while on vacation: 37%
- Go to a pond or lake: 33%
- Go fishing: 31%
- Swim in a home pool: 28%
- Go to a water park, water slide, or other water attraction: 27%
- Go boating, sailing, water skiing, jet skiing, or surfing: 25%
- Go to a public pool: 24%
- Go snorkeling or SCUBA diving: 10%
- Take swimming lessons: 2%

All Americans
Nearly a third plan to swim in a place without a lifeguard present

- One in three (32%) expects to swim in a place without a lifeguard present.
- Just one in four (26%) plans to swim in a place with a lifeguard present.

Q6: Which, if any, of the following water activities do you expect to participate in this summer?

- Those who know how to swim are significantly more likely to swim without a lifeguard present (39%) than those who do not know how to swim (4%).
- Those who report having all 5 safety skills are significantly more likely to plan to swim in a place without a lifeguard present (46%) than those who do not (21%).
More than a quarter of Americans say they will be supervising children in the water.

27% of Americans expect to supervise a child near a pool, lake, or other body of water this summer.

18% of those who are NOT able to perform all water safety skills expect to supervise a child near a pool, lake, or other body of water this summer.

Some groups are more likely than others to expect to supervise a child near a pool, lake or other body of water this summer.

- Swimmers vs non-swimmers (32% vs. 6%)
- Those who have taken swim lessons vs those who have not (32% vs. 25%)

Q6: Which, if any, of the following water activities do you expect to participate in this summer?
Six in ten Americans have not taken professional swim lessons

- I have taken group swimming lessons or a swimming class from a professional or certified instructor: 32%
- I have taken private swimming lessons from a professional or certified instructor: 12%
- I have taken swimming lessons from a friend or relative: 17%
- I taught myself to swim: 37%
- I have never taken a swim lesson: 29%

Those who say they can swim are more likely to have taken a professional lesson than those who say they cannot (44% vs 16%).

Among those who say they can swim, 56% say they have *never* taken a professional lesson.

Q3: Which, if any, of the following apply to you?

Subgroup breakouts on the next slide
Subgroup Breakouts for Swim Lessons
Location:
- Southerners (14%) are significantly more likely than those in the Midwest (7%) to have taken private swimming lessons from a professional or certified instructor, while Midwesterners are more likely to have taken group swimming lessons or a swimming class from a professional or certified instructor (38% vs. 27%).
- Those in rural areas (44%) are significantly less likely than those in urban (55%) and suburban (54%) areas to report having taken swim lessons of any kind.

Age:
- Just 7% of those 65+ have taken swimming lessons from a friend or family member, compared to 26% of 18-24-year-olds and 27% of those 25-34.

Gender:
- Women are significantly more likely than men to have taken professional swim lessons (43% vs 34%); however men are significantly more likely than women to have taught themselves to swim (44% vs. 29%).

Race
- 49% of whites and 55% of African Americans have taken any swim lessons (including group or private lessons from a professional or certified instructor or swimming lessons from a friend or relative)
- African Americans (23%) are significantly more likely than whites (13%) to have taken swimming lessons from a friend or relative, while whites (38%) are more likely than African Americans (27%) to have taught themselves to swim.

Basic Safety Skills
- Those who report having all 5 basic safety skills are significantly more likely than those who do not have those skills to have taken professional lessons (46% vs. 32%) or taught themselves how to swim (45% vs 29%).

Q3: Which, if any, of the following apply to you?
For non-swimming adults, fear and access were the main barriers to childhood swimming.

Q4: For which, if any, of the following reasons did you NOT learn to swim as a child? Base: 173 who say they do not know how to swim

- I was too scared: 39%
- I didn’t have access to a pool or other place to learn to swim: 30%
- My family couldn’t afford swimming lessons: 27%
- There were no swimming lessons offered near where I lived: 24%
- I had no interest in learning: 18%
- I never felt a need to learn because I avoid the water: 18%
- My parents don’t know how to swim and it’s not important to them: 18%
- Swimming is not part of my culture: 12%
- I learned at one point, but don’t remember how to swim: 7%

9% urban
33% suburban*
35% rural*

5% of women
22% of men*
Many barriers keep non-swimming adults from learning to swim now, with fear and lack of interest topping the list.

Q5: Which, if any, of the following keep you from learning how to swim now?

- I am scared of the water: 30% (38% of women, 19% of men)
- I have no interest in learning: 28% (19% of men)
- I am embarrassed about how I look in a swimsuit or swim trunks: 27% (35% of women, 16% of men)
- I have no interest in swimming: 22%
- I don’t enjoy the water: 20%
- I don’t have access to a pool or other place to learn to swim: 19%
- I am embarrassed to admit I don’t know how to swim: 19%
- I am too busy: 19%
- I can’t afford swimming lessons: 17%
- There are no swimming lessons offered near where I live: 14%
- Health or mobility problems prevent me from learning: 8%

Base: 173 who say they do not know how to swim
Most children do not demonstrate basic safety skills — though many are gearing up to learn.

- 39% of parents of children between ages 4-17 report that their child has all five basic water safety skills.
- 20% of parents expect that their child will take swimming lessons this summer.

Q8: Think for a moment about your [OLDEST/YOUNGEST] child between the ages of 4 and 17. For each of the following, please indicate if it is something your [OLDEST/YOUNGEST] child can or cannot do or if you are not sure.

Base: 201 parents of children aged 4-17
Nearly all parents expect that their children will take part in water activities this summer.

- 94% of parents of children between ages 4-17 expect that their child will engage in some sort of water activity this summer.

Q9: Which, if any, of the following water activities do you expect your [OLDEST/YOUNGEST] child between the ages of 4 and 17 to participate in this summer?

Base: 201 parents of children aged 4-17
However, children won’t always be supervised by a professional this summer.

50% of parents expect their children to swim in a place that has a lifeguard.

35% of parents expect their children to swim in a place that has NO lifeguard.

Q9: Which, if any, of the following water activities do you expect your [OLDEST/YOUNGEST] child between the ages of 4 and 17 to participate in this summer?
Base: 201 parents of children aged 4-17
Near-drowning danger hits close to home for many Americans.

Q10: Have you ever had an experience in the water when you were afraid that you might drown?

Q11: Do you happen to know anyone who drowned or nearly drowned?

53% of those with all 5 water safety skills* and 43% of those without all 5 skills have NOT had an experience where they were afraid they might drown.

42% of those in rural areas* and 32% of those in suburban areas know someone who drowned or nearly drowned.
Subgroup Breakouts for Drowning Questions

Location:
- Westerners are significantly more likely than those in the Midwest to report that they have had an experience in the water when they were afraid they might drown (51% vs. 39%), while Southerners are more likely than Westerners to report that they know someone who nearly drowned (23% vs. 14%).
- Those in rural areas are significantly more likely than those in urban or suburban areas to have known someone who has drowned (25% in rural vs 18% suburban and 14% urban).

Ethnicity:
- African Americans are significantly more likely than whites to report knowing someone who drowned or nearly drowned (51% vs. 32%).

Age:
- Near-drowning experiences are significantly more common among those aged 18-24 (56%) and 25-34 (59%) compared to those 45-54 (38%), 55-64 (36%), and 65+ (41%).
- Younger Americans (those aged 18-24) are significantly more likely than those in any other age group to report that they know someone who nearly drowned (36% vs. 22% of 25-34, 14% of 35-44, 22% of 45-54, 12% of 55-64, and 15% of 65+).

Q10: Have you ever had an experience in the water when you were afraid that you might drown?
Q11: Do you happen to know anyone who drowned or nearly drowned?
More than half would do the wrong thing if someone was in trouble in the water.

- If someone was in trouble in the water, 52% would swim out to help the person, unintentionally putting themselves in danger.
- The majority of people would take appropriate steps, such as throwing something that floats to the person (74%) or reaching out to the person with an object such as a long pole (67%).

Q12: If someone was in trouble in the water, which, if any, of the following would you do?

- Throw something that floats to the person: 74%
- Reach out to the person with an object, such as a long pole: 67%
- Call 911 or the local emergency number and wait for help to arrive: 55%
- Swim out to help the person: 52%

Notably, the response rates are split by gender:
- 61% of women vs. 49% of men for throwing something that floats
- 47% of women vs. 57% of men for swimming out to help

*Note: Percentages include both genders.