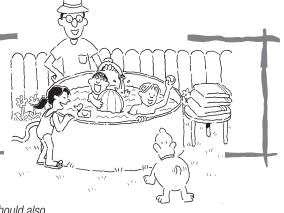# A Parent's Guide to Water Safety

Drowning is one of the top causes of injury and death in children. Children can drown in pools, rivers, ponds, lakes, or oceans. They can even drown in a few inches of water in bathtubs, toilets, and large buckets.

The following is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) about how to keep your children safe in or around water.

Water safety at home

Parents need to keep a close eye on infants and young children, especially as they learn to crawl. *To keep your child safe, make sure you*

- **Never leave your child alone in the bathtub—even for a moment.** Many bathtub drownings happen (even in a few inches of water) when a parent leaves a small child alone or with another young child. Also, bath seats are just bathing aids. Bath seats can tip over and your child can slip out of them, so they won't prevent drowning.
- **Empty water from containers, such as large pails and 5-gallon buckets, immediately after use.**
- **Keep bathroom doors closed.** Install doorknob covers or a hook-and-eye latch or other lock that is out of the reach of your small child.
- **Keep toilets closed.** Always close the toilet lid, and consider using a toilet lid latch.

Water safety at the pool

An adult should actively watch children at all times while they are in a pool. For infants and toddlers, an adult should be in the water and within arm's reach, providing "touch supervision." For older children, an adult should be paying constant attention and free from distractions, like talking on the phone, socializing, tending to household chores, or drinking alcohol. The supervising adult must know how to swim.

Pool rules

If you have a pool, insist that the following rules are followed:
- Keep toys away from the pool when the pool is not in use.
- Empty small blow-up pools after each use.
- No tricycles or other riding toys at poolside.
- No electrical appliances near the pool.
- No diving in a pool that is not deep enough.
- No running on the pool deck.

Pool fences

Children can climb out a window, climb though a doggy door, or sneak out a door to get to the backyard and the pool. To prevent small children from entering the pool area on their own, there should be a fence that completely surrounds the pool or spa. Combined with the watchful eyes of an adult, a fence is the best way to protect your child *and* other children who may visit or live nearby.
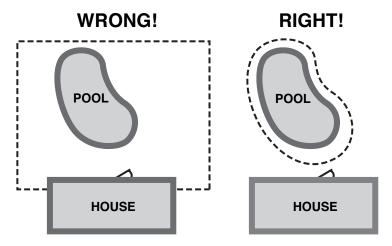
Pool fences should also
- Be climb-resistant and not have anything alongside them (such as lawn furniture) that can be used to climb them.
- Be at least 4 feet high and have no footholds or handholds that could help a child climb them.
- Have no more than 4 inches between vertical slats. Chain-link fences are very easy to climb and are not recommended as pool fences. If they must be used, the diamond shape should not be bigger than 1¾ inches.
- Have a gate that is well maintained and is self-closing and self-latching. It should only open away from the pool. The latches should be higher than a child can reach—54 inches from the bottom of the gate.

For above-ground pools always keep children away from steps or ladders. When the pool is not in use, lock or remove ladders to prevent access by children.

Other protection products, when used with an "isolation" fence, may be of some benefit; however, these are not substitutes for adequate fencing. These may include the following:
- Automatic pool covers (motorized covers operated by a switch). Pool covers should cover the entire pool so that a child can't slip under them. Make sure there is no standing water on top of the pool cover. Be aware that floating solar covers are *not* safety covers.
- Door alarms.
- Doors to the house that are self-closing or self-latching.
- Window guards.
- Pool alarms.

A fence should completely surround the pool, isolating it from the house.

Swimming lessons

Children need to learn to swim. The AAP supports swimming lessons for most children 4 years and older. Because of recent research, the AAP no longer advises against swimming lessons for children 1 to 4 years of age. Keep in mind that because children develop at different rates, each child will be ready to swim at her own rate. Other factors you may consider before starting swimming lessons for younger children include frequency of exposure to water, emotional maturity, physical limitations, and health concerns related to swimming pools (for example, swallowing water, infections, pool chemicals).

Pool conditions should be monitored to make sure chemical and water temperature levels are safe. Another safety measure is to check with the pool operator if there are protective drain covers or vacuum release systems.

Swim classes should be taught by qualified teachers. For children younger than 3 years, the World Aquatic Babies & Children Network recommends that parents must participate, the time the head is submerged under water is limited (swallowing too much water can make your child sick), and classes should be fun and include one-on-one teaching.

It's also important to keep in mind that people who know how to swim well do drown, so swimming lessons will not provide "drown proofing" for a child of any age. Even a child who knows how to swim should be watched at all times.

Diving

Serious spinal cord injuries, permanent brain damage, and death can occur to swimmers who dive into shallow water or spring upward on the diving board and hit it on the way down.

Keep safe by following these simple commonsense diving rules.
- Check how deep the water is. Enter the water feet first, especially when going in for the first time.
- Never dive into above-ground pools; they are usually not deep enough.
- Never dive into the shallow end of a pool.
- Never dive through inner tubes or other pool toys.
- Learn how to dive properly by taking classes.

Water safety in other bodies of water

Swimming in a pool is different from swimming in other bodies of water. In addition to rules for pool safety, parents and children should know the rules for swimming in oceans, lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. *These include*
- Never swim without adult supervision.
- Never dive into water unless an adult who knows the depth of the water says it's OK.
- Always use an approved personal flotation device (life jacket) when boating, riding on a personal watercraft, fishing, waterskiing, or playing in a river or stream. Water wings and other blow-up swimming aids should not be used in place of life vests.
- Never try water sports such as skiing, scuba diving, or snorkeling without instructions from a qualified teacher.
- Never swim around anchored boats, in motorboat lanes, or where people are waterskiing.
- Never swim during electrical storms.
- If you swim or drift far from shore, stay calm and tread water, or float on your back until help arrives.

- Other water hazards found near many homes include canals, ditches, postholes, wells, fishponds, and fountains. Watch your child closely if he is playing near any of these areas.

Life jackets and life preservers

If your family enjoys spending time on the water, make sure everyone wears an approved personal flotation device or life jacket. Some people think life jackets are hot, bulky, and ugly. However, today's models have improved in looks, comfort, and protection. Many states require the use of life jackets and life preservers. They must be present on all boats traveling in water supervised by the US Coast Guard. Remember, without wearing a life jacket, your child is not protected.

Keep the following tips in mind:
- A life jacket should not take the place of adult supervision.
- Choose a life jacket that fits your child's weight and age. It should be approved by the US Coast Guard and tested by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Check the label to be sure. The label should also say whether the jacket is made for an adult or a child.
- Teach your child how to put on her own life jacket and make sure it is worn the right way.
- Blow-up water wings, toys, rafts, and air mattresses should never be used as life jackets or life preservers.

In an emergency

The following are ways to be ready for an emergency:
- **Learn CPR.** Anyone caring for or watching children should know CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). CPR can save a life and help reduce injury after a near drowning. The American Red Cross, the American Heart Association, and your local hospital or fire department offer CPR training.
- **Always have a phone near the pool.** Clearly post your local emergency phone number (usually 911).
- **Post safety and CPR instructions at poolside.**
- **Make sure all rescue equipment is nearby.** This includes a shepherd hook, safety ring, and rope.

The following are things to do in an emergency:
- **Yell for help.** Carefully lift the child out of the water.
- **Start CPR right away.** Have someone call emergency medical services (911).

Never swim alone

No one, adult or child, should ever swim alone. Children should be supervised at all times in and around water. Even a child who knows how to swim can drown a few feet from safety.

Older children and teens are also at risk from drowning, even if they know how to swim. They often drown while swimming in unsupervised places such as water-filled quarries, rivers, or ponds. Although many teens can swim well, they often encounter risky situations that they might not recognize, such as rough currents, surf, and sharp rocks. Alcohol is also a factor in many drownings among teens.

Don't drink and swim

Swimmers are at serious risk of drowning when they drink alcohol or use other drugs while swimming, diving, and playing water sports. These activities require clear thinking, coordination, and the ability to judge distance, depth, speed, and direction. Alcohol impairs all of these skills. People who are supervising other swimmers should not be using alcohol or drugs.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor