

water safety

for parents and caregivers:

drowning prevention tips

Did you know that drowning is the second leading cause of injury death for children in Europe? Young children are most likely to drown in or near their own home.

Actively supervise all young children while they are in, on, or near the water

Drownings and near-drownings occur in familiar surroundings (eg. bath tub, garden pond, local pools; lake, rivers, seashore) during very short lapses in supervision. People believe that a drowning person will make noise and thrash in the water before actually drowning, but this is false. Drownings usually happen quickly and silently, even in very shallow water. When socializing, designate one adult to supervise children around water.

Take care during bath time

If you must leave even momentarily, take your child with you.Do not use bathing seats in the bath. Empty the bath water immediately when finished. Do not ask older siblings to watch younger children in the water. They are not trained or mature enough to be given such a responsibility.

Fill or cover garden ponds

Even the shallowest of ponds can be lethal for children under four years old. Ponds can be filled with sand and be used as a play area. If the pond must be kept and a fence isn't an option, look into installing a rigid, raised mesh cover. Small pools should be emptied of all water after each use, for safety as well as sanitary reasons.

Surround your private pool or garden pond with four-sided fencing and a latching gate

Installation of four-sided fencing which isolates the pool from the house and yard has been shown to decrease the number of pool immersion injuries by more than 50%. The fence should be a minimum 120 cm high. The gate should be self-latching and self-closing, open away from the pool. The latch should be placed high and out of reach of small children. Older children should be taught to always close the gate. Don't leave chairs or tables near the fence; a child could use them to climb over

Be prepared near the pool

Have a telephone poolside and know the emergency number to call for help. After you have called for help, start CPR (Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation) immediately. At a public pool go to the supervisor for help. If a child is missing, always check the water first, including under pool covers.

Stay sober near water

Do not drink alcohol while in or around the water as it can impair your supervision and swimming skills, especially when boating. Among adolescents, alcohol use is a factor in half of all drownings.

Wear a personal flotation device

Even the best swimmers can misjudge the water and their skills when boating or fishing; conditions change quickly in



drowning prevention tips for parents and caregivers



open water. Personal flotation device (PFD) use alone could prevent 85% of drownings. Adolescents are particularly adverse to wearing PFDs, but they have the second highest drowning rate after the 0- 4 age group. Many new PFDs are designed for more comfort and "coolness" to appeal to this high risk group.

Use appropriately sized PFDs to help protect children

Use approved personal flotation devices which fit the size and age of the child. Flotation devices and swimming lessons provide some protection, but this is no substitute for supervision. Be aware that water wings and inflatables are not PFDs and do not prevent drowning.

Safe Use of Watercraft

Children ages 16 and under should never operate a personal watercraft such as a motorboat, jet ski or wave runner. All operators should receive training before use; these vessels are fast and powerful and should not be considered toys.

Take swimming lessons

Children need to be taught how to swim. Preschool-aged children in certified swimming programs show significant improvement in swimming ability and pool deck behaviour. However, these fitness benefits do not necessarily translate into reduced risk of drowning for young swimmers, and it continues to be important to monitor all children closely.

Show swimmers safe wading and diving depths. Young children should be taught safe diving and water entry skills at the same time as swimming. Make it clear to older children where the safe diving areas are, most diving accidents occur in depths that are almost safe but are misjudged.

Swim with a lifeguard present

Alifeguard provides additional supervision by a trained professional who can also assist in case of an emergency, and greatly improves the chances of a good recovery should an incident occur.

Respect flags and symbols

The flags and symbols tell you about the water conditions and need to be followed. These symbols may vary country to country, ensure that you understand local symbols correctly.

Be aware on vacation

If you choose to stay in a holiday apartment, campsite, or house with a swimming pool or garden pond, you must be prepared to keep constant watch on children by the water. Choose a location with a fenced and gated pool. Studies show that the day of arrival and afternoons on other days are the times of highest risk for children drowning. Alarms and pool covers, while providing an additional layer of protection, should be considered supplementary and should not replace your diligent supervision.

Be aware of different risks for different age groups

Young children are more likely to drown near home in pools, garden ponds, wells, and tubs, whereas older children and teens are more likely to drown in unsupervised open water such as beaches or rivers where they have underestimated the risks.

Teach your children these four water safety rules:

- 1. Never swim alone.
- 2. Do not dive into unknown bodies of water, always enter the water feet first.
- 3. Do not push, dunk, or jump on others.
- 4. Know where to get help in case of an emergency.

Get trained in CPR

Once there has been a near drowning, it is crucial to begin CPR (Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation). If initiated promptly, resuscitation by a bystander has been shown to result in significantly better health outcomes in the drowning victim.

(printed May 2007)



