

Keeping children safe at home: Drowning

Protect your child from drowning

Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death for children in the WHO European region. More than 70% of children who drown are boys. Children one to four years of age are at greatest risk.

A child drowning in the home takes many parents by surprise. A child can drown in as little as 2 cm of water and in less time than it takes to answer the telephone. It happens silently within seconds. Drownings and near drownings often occur in familiar surroundings such as bathtubs, garden ponds and pools.

Most people report that the child who drowned had been missing for less than five minutes. In swimming pool drownings, no caregiver has ever reported hearing a splash, even when the caregiver was by the poolside.

Keeping your child safe

- Actively supervise all young children while they are in, on or near water.
- Don't leave children alone near water, even for a moment. If you must leave for the shortest time, take your child with you or designate one adult to supervise your child.
- Do not ask older siblings to watch younger children in the water or bath.
- Do not use bath seats in the bath. If you do, never leave the child alone in the bath seat.
- Empty the water from the bathtub immediately after finishing the bath.
- Empty and turn over all water containers (e.g., pails, barrels) after you use them.
- Fill or cover garden ponds. Fill ponds with sand and use them as sand boxes. If the pond must be kept, make a cover for it using rigid mesh.
- Do not drink alcohol when supervising your children near water.

Home Swimming Pools

- Surround your private pool or garden pond with four-sided fencing and a latching gate.
- The fence should be at least 120 cm high. The gate should be self-latching and self-closing, should open away from the pool, and should be checked frequently to make sure it is in good working order. The latch should be placed high on the fence so that small children cannot reach it.
- Do not use a pool alarm and pool cover in place of a four-sided fence. They do not provide adequate protection. Pool covers can even be a hazard for children. Children trying to walk on a cover can fall into the water and not be visible, causing a delay in rescue.
- Use life jackets (personal floatation devices) to help protect children. Choose a life jacket that fits the size and age of the child. Do not rely on swim seats or floaters to keep your child safe.
- Teach children who do not know how to swim to stay in shallow water.
- Enroll children in certified swimming lessons. Swimming ability is important but is not an absolute safeguard against drowning.
- Teach children to never run, push, or jump on others around water.
- Teach children to check the depth of water in unfamiliar pools before jumping in. They should jump in feet-first on the first dive.
- Teach children never to swim without an adult present and to swim with another person if possible.
- Keep your telephone near water so you can reach it quickly in case of emergency. Make sure you know the telephone number for your local emergency services.
- Take a basic first aid course for more information about how to deal with an emergency.

More info: <http://www.childsafetyeurope.org>

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TIPS