

Swimming Safely and Advice to Prevent Drowning



Drowning and Safety near Water

The definition of drowning that was accepted by the World Congress on Drowning in 2002 and subsequently by the World Health Organisation in 2005 is the following: "Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid."

Drowning is the 3rd leading cause of unintentional injury death worldwide. It does not only occur during times of flooding or rough seas, but in our swimming pools and inside our homes!

Drowning can happen very quickly and in less than 2.5 centimetres of water, so filled bathtubs, swimming pools, hot tubs, and even buckets of water and sinks can be dangerous.

Who is most at Risk?

Research in the U.S. ranked drowning as the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children ages 1 to 14. Children less than a year old are most likely to drown in bathtubs, buckets, or toilets. Children ages 1 to 4 are most likely to drown in residential swimming pools. Children need to be monitored at all times no matter the size of the pool or location where they encounter water.

Anyone can have a water-related accident and be at risk of drowning— even children who know how to swim. It is not only small children who are at risk. Males are much more likely to become victims of drowning. Risk-taking, overconfidence in swimming ability and alcohol use may play a significant role in water deaths by drowning.

Your health and the risk of drowning

Similar to road safety where we discuss the importance of driver fitness, it is important to focus on the physical well-being of anyone entering water. Anyone using alcohol or drugs should rather stay away from the water.

The swimmer should be aware of how his body reacts to the temperature of water. When the body gets cold blood shunts to the core, weakening arms and legs, which then lose strength of power.

A swimmer, who feels tired or bloated should rather rest and stay out of the water.

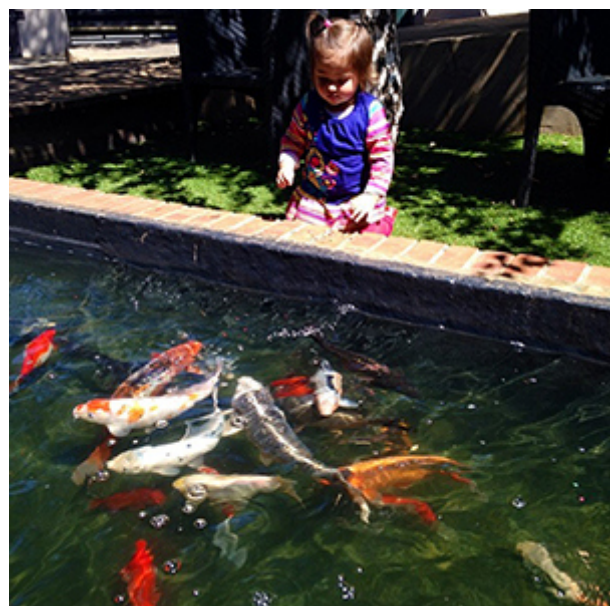
Preventing incidents of drowning at home

Toddlers do not require a swimming pool to be at risk! The water in common household items can be dangerous for young children. A baby can drown in just 2.5 centimetres of water. A curious toddler can fall into a toilet, bucket or fish tank or pond.

Supervision is the very best way to help prevent kids from getting injured. Even the most vigilant parent will however struggle to keep a child 100% safe and away from harm at all times.

It is up to the parents to do everything possible not only to exercise parental supervision and to try and child proof the home! This may be difficult but we would like to offer the following suggestions:

- Keep the bathroom door closed.
- Shut the doors (and install doorknob covers) to any room a child shouldn't enter.
- For sliding doors, doorknob covers and childproof locks are also great for keeping little ones from leaving your home.
- Supervise bath time. Never leave a child alone in the bathtub or in the care of another child.
- If you must answer the telephone or door, don't rely on an older sibling to watch the baby; wrap your baby in a towel and bring him or her with you.



- Drain water from the tub immediately after use.
- Shut toilet lids. Install childproof locks on toilet lids.
- Store buckets safely and empty buckets and other containers immediately after use.
- Don't leave them outside, where they may accumulate water.
- If you have a hot tub, keep it drained or securely covered when not in use.



Safe Swimming and the Pool

Most incidents of drowning occur at our residential swimming pools! Too often do we neglect in our supervision and a toddler ends up in the swimming pool. How can we prevent this?

- We need to supervise as actively as possible - Whenever infants or toddlers are in or around water, an adult should be within arm's reach to provide active supervision
- Parents should avoid distractions when children are near water and give them all of their attention!
- Even strong swimmers need adult supervision. Insist on life jackets for children who can't swim.
- Parents should not only supervise but also advise on safety in and around the pool.
- Running on slippery surfaces is dangerous for everyone around. Someone could fall into the pool, accidentally push a smaller child towards water or hit the slick pool deck causing injury.
- Stay away from drains, filters and water intakes. Loose hair or clothing can get tangled in these structures — possibly trapping a child under the water.
- Teach children to swim. Most children can learn to swim at about age 5 — but know that swimming lessons won't necessarily prevent a child from drowning.
- Remove toys from the pool - don't leave pool toys in the water. A child may fall into the water while trying to retrieve a toy.



Swimming Pool Design and Physical Protection

- 4 sided fencing around the swimming pool is the best protection possible - rigid, motorized pool covers, pool alarms, and other protective devices, which may offer some protection if used appropriately and consistently, will not be as effective as the correct fencing.
- A safe fence will be at least 1.2 meters tall. Make sure slatted fences have no gaps wider than 10 centimetres so kids can't squeeze through.
- Make sure the pool fence meets current safety standards — including a child-proof gate that's always closed
- Consider installing a pool alarm or cover, but realize these devices are not substitutes for fencing and adult supervision.
- Block pool and hot tub access. Use a rigid, motorized safety cover to block access to the pool when it's not in use.
- Secure a cover on hot tubs as well.
- Empty inflatable pools after each use.
- Don't allow water to collect on top of the pool or hot tub cover.
- Remove aboveground pool steps or ladders or lock them behind a fence when the pool isn't in use.
- Keep a close eye on electricity - Keep electrical appliances — TVs, radios and disc players, for example — a safe distance from the water.
- Consider the risks and prepare accordingly to have emergency equipment at hand.
- This could include the first-aid kit, a flotation ring to throw to an exhausted swimmer and an extension pole to pull the swimmer to safety.
- Keep emergency equipment handy. Store a safety ring with a rope beside the pool. Make sure you always have a phone in the pool area.



Safe Swimming and the Outdoors

Drowning also occurs away from the swimming pool in the wide outdoors. Travellers have always been fascinated by water and a splash into rivers, lakes and dams. Drowning risk increases with changing environmental conditions, hazards concealed in murky water, and inaccessibility of emergency medical services.

It is important to recognize the unique hazards in the outdoors, to be prepared and take precautions when entering water in these areas.

- Swimming conditions can be unpredictable with water depth, temperature, currents and weather rapidly changing.
- Plan ahead! To be safe, you need to think about the water conditions, your own limits and the use of safety gear like life jackets.
- Wear a life jacket when you're boating, tubing or rafting.
- Don't swim alone. Never allow children to swim alone or without adult supervision.
- Teach children that swimming in open water is not the same as swimming in a pool.
- Boat owners are required by law to carry life jackets in their boats. Wear one even if you can swim.
- Be very cautious of kids using personal water crafts such as jet skis! They are intended for adults and require special training.
- Wear a life jacket if you are swimming in a lake or river where there are no lifeguards.
- Always enter water feet first - the first descent into any body of water should be feet first.
- Never dive or jump into unfamiliar or shallow water. Check for submerged objects and make sure the water is at least 3-4 metres deep.
- Ask in the area about where people usually swim and whether it is safe.
- Consider both safe entry and exit points when swimming in a river, dam or lake.



Safe Swimming at Sea

We find hundreds of thousands of holiday makers flocking to our beautiful South African beaches in summer time. Your focus to Arrive Alive does not stop when the vehicle stops at the holiday destination. Respect the sea, the currents and the need for caution.

- Before entering the sea swimmers should take time to watch the waves and should avoid places where there is a strong backwash, obvious rip currents or a danger of being washed onto rocks.
- Check the weather and tides before you leave home - if the seas are too rough then you could get swept away.
- Only enter where the waves are straight and gentle.
- If you experience a strong current get out of the sea, or remain well within your depth.
- It is better to swim when the tide is rising as the sea will tend to wash you ashore and the backwash and rip currents are not so strong.
- Check with the lifeguard on surf conditions before swimming.
- Swim in designated areas supervised by lifeguards.
- If lifeguards give you directions or instructions from the stand, obey them. Look out for warning signs and flags:
 - Red flag means it's dangerous to swim.
 - Red and yellow flag means lifeguards are on patrol and you should swim in the area between flags.
- Be considerate of other swimmers especially when surfing.
- Never swim while intoxicated. Alcohol impairs judgement, unnecessary risks are taken and a swimmer will tire more easily, increasing the chance of an accident.
- Avoid swimming immediately after a big meal, as there is a danger of getting cramps.
- Don't dive into shallow sea – there are many paraplegics who broke their necks diving into shallow pools.
- Don't swim in river mouths, dirty water or when bluebottles are present.
- Never swim alone – use the buddy system.
- Don't overestimate your swimming ability, especially early in the summer when the water is cold. Swimming ability is severely decreased in cold water.
- If you are confronted by a large wave and there is not enough time to get away from it, try to dive underneath the wave. Keep your body as low as possible until the wave passes over you. Timing is important, dive into the base of the wave just before it breaks. Do not dive if the water is too shallow – instead crouch and keep a low body profile.
- If caught in rip currents, relax and swim toward the shore at a 45-degree angle until you are free of the current.
- Do not try to swim ashore against the current – it will only tire you.
- If the rip currents are strong, swim parallel with the shoreline in the same direction as the littoral current and then swim diagonally toward the shore.
- If you are not able to swim out of the currents, call or wave for help.

- Never leave a young child unattended near water and do not trust a child's life to another child; teach children to always ask permission to go near water.
- If a child is missing, check the water first. Seconds count in preventing death or disability.
- Swimming aids such as water wings or noodles are fun toys for kids, but they should never be used in place of approved personal flotation devices.
- Be alert and steer clear of plant and animal life. Jellyfish, stingrays and other marine animals can cause painful stings or allergic reactions. Brushing up against certain types of seaweed or coral can result in painful scratches and scrapes.



Response to Incidents of Drowning

Incidents of drowning may occur at any time. It is advised to be prepared for any such eventuality and to render assistance. Consider such scenarios and what you might need to ensure effective emergency medical response!

- Have appropriate equipment, such as reaching or throwing equipment, a cell phone, life jackets and a first aid kit available with emergency instructions inside.
- Know the emergency numbers and have a cellular phone [charged] at hand.
- Important cellular numbers may include not only that of a doctor but also parents' work and cell phone numbers, neighbour's or nearby relative's number (if you need someone to watch other children in an emergency)
- We should all have learning CPR as a top priority – This is a skill that can be the difference between survival and death.



Conclusion

The best manner to prevent drowning is through effective education and training. Educate your kids about swimming safely. Enrol children in swimming lessons when you feel they are ready. Teach children how to tread water, float and to be safe in different watery locations. Teach children to swim with a partner, every time. From the start, teach children to never go near or in water without an adult present.

Most important is to perceive and avoid the risk – when in doubt whether it is safe to enter water – Don't!!

[Photos by Denese Lups and Emergency Medical Services]

Also view:

[NSRI, WaterWise and Preventing Drowning](#)

[Escape from a vehicle submerged under water](#)

[CPR and Road Safety](#)

[The Emergency Medical Kit and Safety on the Road](#)

Source: www.arrivealive.co.za