

# Drowning Prevention In Young Children

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death in young children. Unfortunately, many of these deaths could have been prevented.

Preventing accidents includes a three-way approach:

- Understanding the child's stage of development, skills and behavior patterns
- Improving the quality of care-taking and supervision
- Safe-proofing the environment

## Infants and toddlers

- Very young children are unaware of the danger of water, and are helpless in the water.
- NEVER leave an infant or toddler unattended in the bath, even for a few seconds or even if the baby is in a restraint device.
- Very young children have been known to drown in as little as two inches of water. When they fall into even a little water, they can inhale it and panic. They do not know enough to get up out of the water.
- Empty wading pools after use and turn upside down. An overnight rainfall can turn a fun activity into a serious hazard for curious toddlers.
- Cover faucets that are accessible to children with a safety device that prevents them from turning the knobs. Be sure your hot water heater is turned down to a medium setting to avoid scalds.
- Use a toilet-locking device and always empty mop buckets immediately after using. Young children have been known to drown in these receptacles. Crawling infants and mobile toddlers have large heads and tend to be "top heavy." If they fall into a toilet or bucket, they do not have the upper body strength to get themselves out.

## General guidelines for all children

- Continue to supervise children in the bath until at least age six.
- Be aware that the combination of water and electricity creates an additional hazard—electrocution.
- Be sure bathrooms are equipped with ground fault interrupt outlets.
- Never let children near sinks that have electrical appliances nearby — hair dryers, curling irons, radios, etc.
- If you have a pool or hot tub, take extra precautions when there are young children in the house. Be sure doors from the home to pool areas have suitable locks. Pools and hot tubs should have rigid covers. Check your local city regulations regarding fences and locks on pools. Consider a motion detection alarm system on doors and gates leading to these hazards.
- Swimming lessons for children are a great idea, but they DO NOT "drown proof" children. Don't let the fact that your child can swim give you a false sense of security. Children MUST be supervised in the water by an adult at all times.
- Take a child CPR class and keep current in these techniques.
- Be sure your pool has safety devices like a life-saving ring and rope, and a rescue pole.
- If your home is near a pond, creek or other body of water, consider a fence around your yard. Increased supervision will be essential in this situation.
- If you spend time at the lake, educate your children in the rules of safety around water. Children should never be on docks or in boats, even when anchored, without adult supervision.
- Be sure your child wears a certified life jacket when participating in water activities.

For more parenting information,  
contact the Family Life Education  
Office at 605-322-3660.

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