

Water Safety

With warm weather approaching and an increase in water activities, I thought it would be a good time to discuss water safety. Drowning is a leading cause of pediatric injury and death throughout the world. In the United States in 1998, more than 1,500 children younger than 20 years of age died from drowning, making it the second leading cause of accidental death. For children 12 to 23 months of age, drowning was the leading cause of accidental death and the second leading cause of death overall. (1) I have reported these facts not to scare you, but to impress upon you the importance of this topic. Since the most important intervention to improve outcome from drowning is prevention, I will focus on behaviors and techniques you can use as parents and caregivers to help prevent your child from becoming a drowning victim.

First of all, all infants and toddlers should be adequately supervised at all times. Unfortunately, the youngest of victims lack physical and cognitive maturity to rescue themselves from water. With this fact in mind, it is imperative that we as adult supervisors insure that infants and toddlers are **ALWAYS** supervised when around water, including the bathtub! Since we all know that supervision is not foolproof, there must be multiple layers of prevention. Your children should wear life jackets at all times when on boats or near bodies of water. Teach your child how to put on his or her own life jacket and make sure your child is comfortable wearing a life jacket and knows how to use it. The life jacket should be the right size for your child. The jacket should not be loose and it should always be worn as instructed with all straps belted. Blow-up water wings, toys, rafts, and air mattresses should never be used as life jackets or life preservers, they are not safe. Adults should wear life jackets for their own protection and to set a good example. Secondly, there should be barriers between children and water. Proper pool fencing that includes a self-closing, self-latching gate should surround the pool on all sides, including the side nearest the house. Third, swimming lessons can be a useful tool to help your child feel comfortable in the water. Although swimming lessons can be helpful and may improve water safety, they should not be assumed to make a child “drown-proof.” In addition, swimming lessons are not developmentally appropriate for children younger than 4 years of age, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Lastly, if a drowning does occur, rapid water rescue and initiation of effective bystander cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is critical to limit the amount of long-term damage sustained. To that end, it is important for all parents and caregivers to become CPR certified. Prior to or soon after CPR is initiated, emergency medical personnel should be summoned. Swimming during the summer months should be an enjoyable time for your family, please insure that your children are kept safe.

(1) Meyer, Robyn J. et al. Childhood Drowning. *Pediatrics in Review*:27:5:163-168. May 2006.