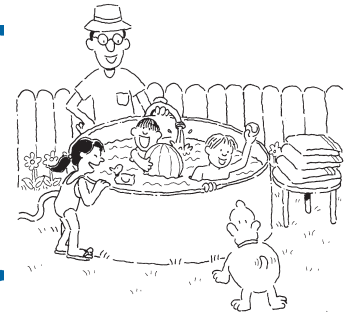


# A Parent's Guide to Water Safety

## Part I Infants and Preschoolers



In many parts of the United States, drowning is the number one cause of death in children under age 5. Children drown in pools, rivers, bathtubs, toilets, and even large buckets of water. Any amount of water—even a few inches in a bathtub—can be dangerous to a child. This brochure has been developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics to help you keep your children safe around water.

### Infants (0–1 year of age)—home hazards

Infants and toddlers are not able to protect themselves from drowning, even in a few inches of water. Children this age are most at risk of drowning in bathtubs or by falling into large buckets found around the house. Many bathtub drownings happen when a parent leaves a small child alone or with another young child. Remember, *never* leave a young child alone in a bathtub—even for a few seconds. Even supporting devices, such as bath rings, are not enough to keep your child from drowning. Children must be watched by an adult *at all times* while in the bathtub.

Toilets, 5-gallon buckets, and other large containers commonly found in the home (like large coolers with melted ice in them) are also very dangerous for a child of this age. Every year there are reports of children who have leaned forward while looking into an open toilet or large bucket, tipped into the toilet or bucket, and drowned. Since the head is the heaviest part of a small child's body, he or she can easily fall into these containers. Also, when large containers are filled with liquid, they weigh more than the child and will not tip over to allow the child to get out. Parents need to keep a close eye on their children, especially as they learn to crawl. Make sure to:

- Empty all buckets and any other large containers after each use.
- Never leave a small child alone in a bathroom.
- Keep bathroom doors closed at all times. Install a hook-and-eye latch, a doorknob cover on the outside of the door, or reverse the doorknob so that the lock is on the outside.
- Keep toilets closed or use toilet locks to keep small children from falling into them.

### Preschoolers (1–5 years of age)—swimming pools

Parents should not put a swimming pool in their yard until their child is over 5 years of age. Swimming pools are the number one drowning risk for preschool-age children. A child can drown in her own backyard pool or spa even while an adult is there. In most cases, though, tragedy happens when a young child wanders away from the house and into the pool without a parent knowing it. A child can easily slip into the water without making a sound or splash. It is not until a parent notices the child missing that she is found in the water.

### Swimming lessons

Though swimming lessons are widely available, they are not recommended for children under age 3. There are two reasons:

- Parents may get a false sense of security because they think their child can swim.
- Young children have a higher risk of getting infections from dirty water or getting sick from swallowing too much water.

If you want to put your small child in a swimming program, choose one that does not require your child to put his or her head under water. Also, find a program that allows you to be involved in all activities. Once your child is ready (usually around 5 years old), enroll him or her in swimming lessons. This will help your child to feel more comfortable in and around water. Remember, teaching your child to swim DOES NOT mean he or she is safe in the water. Even a child who knows how to swim may drown a few feet from safety if he or she gets confused or scared. Also remember that even a child who knows how to swim needs to be watched at all times. No one, adult or child, should ever swim alone.

### CPR: life-giving breath

CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) can save a child's life and help reduce injury after a near-drowning. Anyone watching a small child around a pool should learn and regularly review CPR for infants and children. In an emergency, CPR should be given immediately at poolside. Studies have found that the sooner CPR is given, the greater a victim's chances of survival. CPR training is available through the American Red Cross, the American Heart Association, and your local hospital or fire department.

Besides CPR training, here are some other ways to be ready for an emergency:

- Always have a phone near the pool and post the telephone numbers for the emergency medical services (usually 911) in your area.
- Post safety and CPR instructions at poolside.
- Make sure all rescue equipment (shepherd's hook, safety ring, rope) is nearby.

In the event of an emergency:

- Yell for help. Carefully lift the child out of the water.
- Start CPR right away. Have someone call the emergency medical service (911).
- Even if the child seems normal when revived, see your pediatrician right away.

## Rules for pool safety

There are several other things you can do to keep your small child safe around a pool. Watch him or her closely when near pools or spas. Never leave a small child alone in or near a pool, even for a moment. Keep toys away from the pool so that your child is not tempted to reach for them. Empty blow-up pools and put them away after each use. The following rules will also help keep your child safe around water:

- Never swim alone.
- Do not use a diving board in a pool that is not approved for it.
- Avoid pool slides; they are very dangerous.
- Prevent shock hazards by keeping electrical appliances away from the pool.
- Do not allow tricycles or wagons at poolside.
- Keep a phone at poolside for emergency use.

It may not be possible to watch a child every second. For this reason, there should be a fence around the pool or spa that:

- completely separates the pool from the house and play area of the yard
- has four sides—not including the wall of the house
- is at least 48 inches tall
- does not have more than 4 inches between slats (in chain-link fences, the diamond shape should not be bigger than  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches)
- has a self-closing and self-latching gate that is in good working order. The latches should be higher than a child can reach
- has a gate that opens away from the pool so that, if unlatched, it closes when a toddler leans against it

Combined with the watchful eyes of an adult, a fence is the best way to protect not only your child, but other children who may visit or live in the neighborhood. Automatic pool covers (motorized covers operated by a switch), door alarms, or pool alarms also can be helpful when used with a four-sided fence. When using pool covers, cover the pool completely so that your child cannot slip under the pool cover. Make sure there is no standing water on top of the pool cover. Be aware that floating solar covers are not safety covers.

## Life jackets and life preservers

If your family enjoys boating, sailing, and canoeing on lakes, rivers, and streams, make sure everyone wears the correct life jacket. Many young people think life jackets are hot, bulky, and ugly. However, today's models look better, feel better, and provide better protection. Many states require the use of life jackets and life preservers, and they must be present on all boats traveling in bodies of water supervised by the US Coast Guard. Parents should choose life jackets that are appropriate for their child's weight and age and are approved by the US Coast Guard.

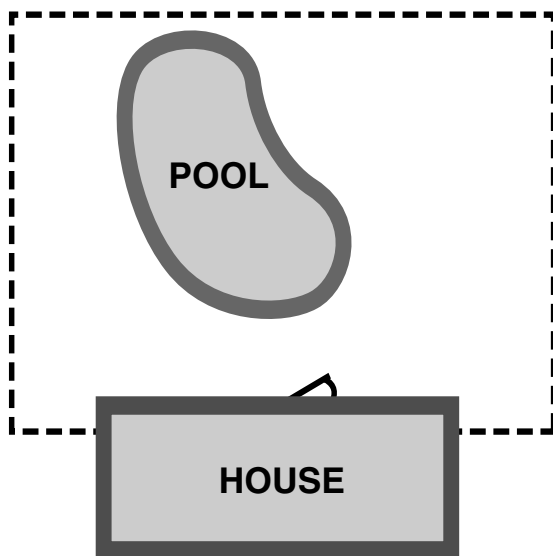
Use only life jackets that have been tested by Underwriters Laboratory (UL). If they have been tested, they will have a label that says so. Life jackets are also labeled as to whether they are for a child or adult. Remember, unless your child uses a life jacket, he or she is not protected. Also, a life jacket should not be used in place of adult supervision.

Keep the following tips in mind:

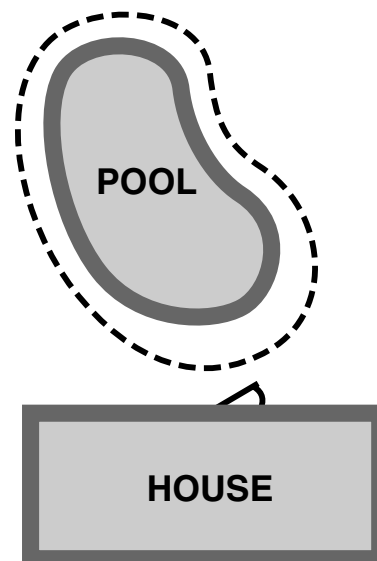
- Your child should wear a life jacket at all times when on boats or near bodies of water.
- Teach your child how to put on his or her own life jacket.
- Make sure your child is comfortable wearing a life jacket and knows how to use it.
- Make sure the life jacket is the right size for your child. The jacket should not be loose. 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.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

### WRONG!



### RIGHT!



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