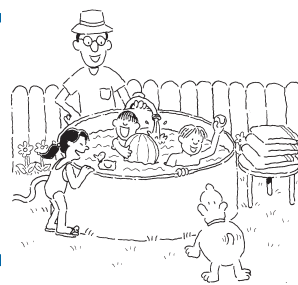


A Parent's Guide to Water Safety

Part II School-age Children and Adolescents



School-age children (5–12 years of age)—outdoor hazards

Swimming and water sports are great fun and good exercise for children this age. However, many drownings of school-age children occur in oceans, lakes, rivers, and streams. Never let your child swim in any body of water without an adult watching. Also, do not let your child water-ski, scuba dive, or snorkel without instructions from a qualified teacher.

Other water hazards found near many homes include ditches, post holes, wells, fish ponds, and fountains. Watch your child closely if he is playing near any of these areas.

Rules for swimming safety

Teach your child the following safety rules and make sure they are obeyed:

- Never swim alone.
- Never dive into water unless given the okay by an adult who knows the depth of the water.
- Always use a life vest when boating, fishing, waterskiing, or playing in a river or stream.
- Never swim around anchored boats, in motorboat lanes, or where people are waterskiing.
- Never swim during electrical storms.
- Never push or hold another person under water, or call for help in fun. A cry for help should only be made in a true emergency.
- If you should swim or drift far from shore, stay calm, and tread water or float on your back until help arrives. Keep your hands under the surface of the water for better body position, balance, and floating.
- Do not let your child use blow-up toys or mattresses in water that is above her waist. Remember, water wings and other blow-up swimming aids should not be used in place of life vests. In fact, they often give a false sense of security and can even be dangerous if they deflate suddenly or if your child slips out of them.

Adolescents (12–18 years old)—diving and swimming while intoxicated

Older children and teenagers are also at risk from drowning even though they are more likely to have had swimming lessons. Children in this age group often drown while swimming in unsupervised places such as water-filled quarries, rivers, or ponds. Often the swimmer thinks he can swim better than he actually can, and does not understand the water currents or the depth of the water. Adolescents are also at risk of drowning as a result of serious injury from diving or swimming while drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

Diving

Many swimmers are seriously injured each year from diving mishaps. Serious spinal cord injuries, brain damage, and death can occur to swimmers who:

- dive into shallow areas of lakes, ponds, streams, or swimming pools where the depth of the water is not known
- dive into aboveground pools
- hit the bottom of a pool as it slopes toward the shallow end
- spring upward from the diving board and hit it on the way down

Avoid getting hurt by following these simple common-sense rules:

- Never swim or dive while drinking alcohol or using other drugs.
- Check the depth of the water—go into the water feet first, especially when going in the water for the first time.
- Never dive into aboveground pools because they are usually not deep enough.
- Never dive into the shallow end of a pool.
- Never dive through inner tubes or other pool toys.
- Learn how to dive properly by taking classes.

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.

Alcohol

Among teenagers, drowning is often the result of risky behavior, alcohol, or both. Drinking alcohol or using other drugs while swimming, diving, and playing water sports puts swimmers at serious risk of drowning. These activities require clear thinking, coordination, and the ability to judge distance, depth, speed, and direction. Alcohol affects the part of the brain that allows a person to stay in control and impairs all of these skills.

Encourage your teen to take swimming, diving, and water safety or rescue classes. This will give him or her the skills needed to swim and dive safely. Your teen will also be less likely to act recklessly.

Children are naturally curious about water—whether it be in a pool, lake, or large bucket. However, each year, too many young children die or are left brain damaged because of preventable drowning injuries. By following simple safety precautions, your family can enjoy the water and prevent these tragedies.

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.

From your doctor

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.

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