



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives. Protecting People.™

Drowning Happens Quickly– Learn How to Reduce Your Risk



About ten people die every day from unintentional drowning. Of these, two are children 14 or younger. Learning the risks and taking safety precautions are proven ways to prevent drowning injuries and deaths.

Know the Facts

When you're spending the day splashing around at the pool, beach or lake, drowning may not be the first thing on your mind. Yet drowning ranks fifth among the leading causes of unintentional injury death in the United States and kills more toddlers 1-4 years old than anything but birth defects.¹ (</features/drowningprevention/index.html#one>) About ten people die every day from unintentional drowning. Of these, two are children 14 or younger. The good news is that most of these deaths are predictable and preventable. Being aware of the risks and taking safety precautions are proven ways to prevent drowning injuries and deaths. Learn the facts and take action to protect yourself and the ones you love from drowning.

Take Action to Reduce Risks



- **Learn to swim.** Formal swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning by as much as 88% among young children aged 1 to 4 years, who are at greatest risk of drowning.² (</features/drowningprevention/index.html#two>) However, even when children have had formal swimming lessons, constant, careful supervision when in the water, and barriers to prevent unsupervised access are necessary to prevent drowning.

- **Closely watch swimmers in or around the water.** Designate a responsible adult who can swim and knows CPR to watch swimmers in or around water – even when lifeguards are present. That adult should not be involved in any other distracting activity (such as reading, or talking on the phone) while watching children.
- **Learn Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).** In the time it might take for lifeguards or paramedics to arrive, your CPR skills could save someone's life.
- **Fence it off.** Barriers to pool access should be used to help prevent young children from gaining access to the pool area without caregivers' awareness when they aren't supposed to be swimming. Pool fences should completely separate the house and play area from the pool, be at least 4 feet high, and have self-closing and self-latching gates that open outward, with latches that are out of the reach of children.
- **Use the Buddy System.** Regardless of your age, always swim with a buddy.
- **Look for lifeguards.** Select swimming sites that have lifeguards whenever possible.
- **Heed warning flags.** Know the meaning of and obey warnings represented by colored beach flags  [PDF - 201KB]
(http://www.usla.org/resource/resmgr/lifeguard_library/flagwarningstandardsilsfinal.pdf) 
(<http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html>), which may vary from one beach to another.
- **Know the terrain.** Be aware of and avoid drop-offs and hidden obstacles in natural water sites. Always enter water feet first.
- **Avoid rip currents.** Watch for dangerous waves and signs of rip currents, like water that is discolored and choppy, foamy, or filled with debris and moving in a channel away from shore. If you are caught in a rip current, swim parallel to shore; once free of the current, swim diagonally toward shore. More information about rip currents (<http://ripcurrents.noaa.gov/overview.shtml>) 
(<http://www.cdc.gov/Other/disclaimer.html>).
- **Use U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets.** Do not use air-filled or foam toys, such as "water wings", "noodles", or inner-tubes, in place of life jackets. These toys are not designed to keep swimmers safe.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Avoid drinking alcohol before or during swimming, boating, or water skiing. Don't drink alcohol while supervising children.
- **Don't hyperventilate.** Swimmers should never hyperventilate before swimming underwater or try to hold their breath for long periods of time. This can cause them to pass out (sometimes called "shallow water blackout") and drown.

References

1. Brenner RA, Taneja GS, Haynie DL, Trumble AC, Qian C, Klinger RM, Klevanoff MA. Association between swimming lessons and drowning in childhood: A case-control study. Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine 2009;163(3):203-10.
2. CDC. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) (</injury/wisqars/index.html>). Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2009.

More Information

- Facts about water related injuries (</HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html>)
- Facts about unintentional drowning (</SafeChild/Drowning>)
- Drowning in the US 2005-2009: CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6119a4.htm?s_cid=mm6119a4_w)

- [CDC Research and Activities \(/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/drown-activities.html\)](/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/drown-activities.html)

CDC works 24/7 saving lives and protecting people from health threats to have a more secure nation. A US federal agency, CDC helps make the healthy choice the easy choice by putting science and prevention into action. CDC works to help people live longer, healthier and more productive lives.

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