Drowning Prevention

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Drowning is a major public health issue that can be prevented.

- More children ages 1–4 die from drowning than any other cause.
- Drowning happens in seconds and is often silent.
- Drowning can happen to anyone, any time there is access to water.

You can prevent drowning.

Learn basic swimming and water safety skills

Formal swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning.[1-5] Children who have had swimming lessons still need close and constant supervision when in or around water.

Build fences that fully enclose pools

Construct and use a four-sided fence that is at least four feet in height and fully encloses the pool and separates it from the house, with self-closing and self-latching gates 🔲 🔲 . Remove all toys from the pool area that might attract children to the pool when the pool is not in use.

Supervise closely

Designate a responsible adult to supervise closely and constantly when children are in or near water (including bathtubs). You can assign a specific adult to supervise each child when they have access to water. Adults watching kids in or near water should avoid distracting activities like reading, using the phone, and consuming

alcohol or drugs, because drowning happens quickly and quietly.[1,6] After swim time is over, shut and lock doors that give access to water. Be proactive and learn about any risks when visiting another home or unfamiliar location. Adults should supervise children closely even when lifeguards are present.

Wear a life jacket

Life jackets reduce the risk of drowning while boating for people of all ages and swimming abilities. Life jackets should be used by children for all activities while in and around natural water. Life jackets can also be used by weaker swimmers of all ages in and around natural water and swimming pools. Do not rely on air-filled or foam toys, as these are not safety devices.[1,7]

Learn CPR

Your CPR skills could save someone's life in the time it takes for paramedics to arrive. Many organizations such as American Red Cross ↗ and American Heart Association ↗ offer CPR training courses, both online and in-person.

Know the risks of natural waters

Lakes, rivers, and oceans have hidden hazards such as dangerous currents or waves, rocks or vegetation, and limited visibility.[8] Check the forecast before activities in, on, or near water. Local weather conditions can change quickly and cause dangerous flash floods, strong winds, and thunderstorms with lightning strikes.

Avoid alcohol

Avoid drinking alcohol before or during swimming, boating, or other water activities. Alcohol impairs judgment, balance, and coordination.[9] Do not drink alcohol while supervising children.

Use the buddy system

Always swim with a buddy. Choose swimming sites that have lifeguards when possible. The buddy system is especially beneficial for people with seizure disorders or other medical conditions that increase their risk of drowning.[1]

Take additional precautions for medical conditions

Know if your medical condition might increase your risk for drowning and take extra care. For example, if you or a family member have a seizure disorder like epilepsy, have one-on-one supervision around water. People with seizure disorders can also consider taking a shower rather than a bath. Take extra precaution around water if you or a family member has other conditions that can increase drowning risk, like heart conditions or autism.[1,10-12]

Consider the effects of medications

Avoid swimming if you take medications that impair your balance, coordination, or judgement. These side effects increase the risk of drowning. Several medications can produce these side effects, such as those used for anxiety and other mental health conditions.[13]

Don't hyperventilate or hold your breath for a long time

Do not hyperventilate before swimming underwater or try to hold your breath underwater for long periods of time. This can cause you to pass out and drown. This is sometimes called "hypoxic blackout" or "shallow water blackout".[14]