

# POOLS SAFE

## DROWNING PREVENTION



Swimming is a great way to stay fit and have some family fun. But to protect your loved ones, safety must be a priority when at the pool. Why? Because drowning is a leading cause of injury death for children ages 1 to 4 (toddlers) and most toddler drownings happen in home swimming pools. For people of all ages, drowning is the fifth leading cause of unintentional injury death.

### The tragedy of drownings

Drowning is often swift, silent and occurs in as little as 30 seconds. Nationally, about 10 people die from unintentional drowning every day—on average two of these deaths are children aged 14 or under. For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency department care for near drownings that can cause brain damage and result in long-term disabilities. Most young children who drowned in pools were last seen in the home, had been out of sight less than five minutes, and were in the care of one or both parents at the time.

The good news is that drowning can be prevented. For the best protection, combine the safety measures listed below. This is called adding “layers of protection.”

### Always watch children in or around the water. There is no substitute for supervision.

- Designate a responsible adult to watch children swimming or playing in or around the pool. At social events, take turns being the designated “water watcher.”
- Stay within arm’s reach of your children at all times.
- Avoid distractions while supervising, like reading, playing cards, texting or talking on the phone.

- Supervise your children even at pools with lifeguards. Lifeguards are highly-trained to boost swimmer safety, but there may only be a few lifeguards at a very crowded pool. Lifeguards are not babysitters. Do your part and watch your own children. Unfortunately, it’s often another swimmer or bystander who first notices that someone has drowned.
- Adults and older children should always swim with a buddy when at a pool that’s not lifeguarded. Even good swimmers can drown if they are injured or have a medical emergency.



### Put weak swimmers in life jackets

- Put children who are weak swimmers in life jackets or buy a swimsuit/life jacket combination. Make sure the life jackets are U.S. Coast Guard approved.
- Air-filled or foam toys are not safety devices. “Water wings,” “noodles,” inner tubes, etc. should not be used instead of life jackets. These toys are not life jackets and are not designed to keep swimmers safe.

## Install barriers and alarms

- In many homes, the yard is fenced but doors open directly from the house onto the pool area (called three-sided fencing). This is not as safe as adding another fence to completely separate the swimming pool (called four-sided fencing). In fact, more than half of all swimming pool drownings among young children could be prevented by four-sided fencing that completely separates the pool from the house and the yard.
- Install a four-sided pool fence that completely separates the pool area from the house and yard. The fence should be at least 4 feet high and not climbable. Gates should be lockable, open away from the pool and have self-closing and self-latching hardware. Latches must be out of the reach of children.
- Add a pool alarm and power safety cover for additional protection. (Safety covers are not a substitute for a fence.)
- If you only have a three-sided fence, install alarms on all doors and windows that lead to the pool. Install self-closing, self-latching hinges on doors.
- Portable or inflatable above-ground pools also pose a drowning risk. Young children can get into them easily but have trouble getting out. The same safety precautions to prevent access to the water should be followed as for in-ground pools, including four-sided fencing.

## Enroll your children in swimming lessons

Formal swimming lessons and water-safety skills training can start at a young age. The American Academy of Pediatrics supports swimming lessons for children as young as 1 year of age. The decision to begin swimming lessons should be based on the individual child's exposure to water, emotional maturity, physical limitations and health concerns. Participation in formal swimming lessons may reduce the risk of drowning by as much as 88 percent among young children aged 1 to 4 years.

## Prepare for an emergency

- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid. In the time it takes for paramedics to arrive, your CPR skills could save someone's life.
- Keep a phone right by the pool, with emergency phone numbers posted nearby.

- Keep rescue gear such as a life ring with a rope, life jackets and a long pole (called a shepherd's crook) next to the pool.
- Have, and practice, an emergency plan. If your child is missing, check the pool first.

## More safety tips around the pool

- Only swim in pools with water clear enough to see the bottom and main drains. If the bottom of the pool isn't visible, you won't be able to see a swimmer in trouble.
- Remove toys from in and around the pool when it is not in use. Toys attract children to the pool.
- Make sure lawn furniture and landscape features are kept away from the pool fence so children can't use them to climb into the pool area.
- To prevent being trapped underwater by the pool's suction drains, use safety drain covers and other devices.
- If swimmers have long hair, use hair bands to keep hair away from the suction drain covers.
- Teach swimmers not to play near suction drain covers.

### For more information:

**Pool Safe campaign** [www.srhd.org/poolsafe.asp](http://www.srhd.org/poolsafe.asp)

### Seattle Children's Hospital

[www.seattlechildrens.org/classes-community/community-programs/drowning-prevention/](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/classes-community/community-programs/drowning-prevention/)

