



fact sheet

Georgia Department of Human Resources

PREVENTING CHILDHOOD DROWNING

THE PROBLEM

- Nearly 1,000 children die every year by drowning.
- Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 1 to 4 (*Safe Kids Worldwide, 2005*).
- Drowning is a quick and silent death (children lose consciousness within two minutes with irreversible damage occurring within four to six minutes).
- Although drowning among infants who are less than one year old typically occurs in residential bathtubs, drowning can also occur in places where as little as one inch of water is present (i.e. wading pools, buckets, ditches, toilets and hot tubs).
- For every child who dies from drowning, four are hospitalized. Near-drowning can result in serious injuries, including brain damage.

HOW TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE FROM DROWNING

INFANTS

SUPERVISION

- Never leave infants unattended, drowning can occur in places where as little as one inch of water is present (i.e. wading pools, buckets, ditches, toilets and hot tubs).

ENVIRONMENT

- Four-sided isolation fencing, at least 5 feet high and equipped with self-closing and self-latching gates, should be installed around pools and spas to prevent direct access from a house or yard. Never prop open the gate to a pool barrier or leave toys that may attract young children in or around a pool.
- Install barriers of protection around your home pool or spa in addition to the fencing, such as pool alarms, pool covers, door alarms or locks.
- Limit access to water sources in the home by installing and using appropriate safety devices (such as door locks and toilet latches) and by emptying and inverting buckets and wading pools immediately after use.

EDUCATION

- Parents and caregivers should learn infant and child CPR.

CHILDREN BETWEEN AGES ONE AND FOUR

SUPERVISION

- Never allow children to swim without adult supervision.
- Limit access to water sources in the home by installing and using appropriate safety devices (such as door locks and toilet latches) and by emptying and inverting buckets and wading pools immediately after use.
- Install barriers of protection around your home pool or spa in addition to the fencing, such as pool alarms, pool covers, door alarms or locks.
- Always designate a responsible adult to serve as the “water watcher” – a supervisor whose sole responsibility is to constantly observe children in or near the water.
 - Supervisors should maintain continuous visual and auditory contact with children in or near the water, and should stay in close proximity (waterside) so that they can effectively intervene if an emergency situation should arise.
 - Supervisors should not engage in distracting behaviors such as talking on the phone, preparing a meal or reading.
 - Supervisors should keep children who cannot swim within arm's reach at all times.
- While there is no specific recommended ratio of supervisors to child swimmers, the number of supervisors should increase when many children are swimming, younger or inexperienced swimmers are present, or the swimming area is large.

EDUCATION

- Parents and caregivers should learn infant and child CPR.

CHILDREN BETWEEN AGES FIVE AND NINE

SUPERVISION

- Never allow children to swim without adult supervision.
- Always designate a responsible adult to serve as the “water watcher” – a supervisor whose sole responsibility is to constantly observe children in or near the water.
 - Supervisors should maintain continuous visual and auditory contact with children in or near the water, and should stay in close proximity (waterside) so that they can effectively intervene if an emergency situation should arise.
 - Supervisors should not engage in distracting behaviors such as talking on the phone, preparing a meal or reading.
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- While there is no specific recommended ratio of supervisors to child swimmers, the number of supervisors should increase when many children are swimming, younger or inexperienced swimmers are present, or the swimming area is large.

ENVIRONMENT

- Children should swim only in designated and supervised swimming areas.

GEAR

- Children should always wear appropriately sized U.S. Coast Guard-approved Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) when on boats, in or near open bodies of water or participating in water sports. The PFD should fit snugly and not allow the child's chin or ears to slip through the neck opening.
- Air-filled swimming aids, such as “water wings” and inner tubes, are not safety devices and should never be used as a substitute for a PFD.
- Rescue equipment, a telephone and emergency phone numbers should be kept poolside.

EDUCATION

- Children should be enrolled in swimming lessons by age 8. Parents can check with their local department of parks and recreation or Red Cross chapter to find a certified instructor near them. Look for classes that include emergency water survival techniques training.
- Parents and caregivers should learn infant and child CPR.
- Educate children about the rules of water safety, including:
 - Always swim with a buddy and an adult present;
 - Never swim in an open body of water or participate in water sports without wearing a PFD;
 - Never dive into a river, lake or ocean; and
 - If someone is in trouble in the water, call for help and throw something that floats to the victim. A child should never enter the water to try to save someone.

CHILDREN BETWEEN AGES 10 AND 14

SUPERVISION

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 - Never swim in an open body of water or participate in water sports without wearing a PFD;
 - Never dive into a river, lake or ocean; and
 - If someone is in trouble in the water, call for help and throw something that floats to the victim. A child should never enter the water to try to save someone.

CHILDREN 14 AND OLDER

SUPERVISION

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- Rescue equipment, a telephone and emergency phone numbers should be kept poolside.

FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS AND POLICY MAKERS

- Contribute funding for and support environment that access to pools and adequate supervision.
- Advocate for community-wide swimming lessons/water safety instruction for children beginning at a young age by a certified swimming instructor.
- Empower, implement and enforce local ordinances for, four-sided isolation fencing at least five feet high and equipped with self-closing, self-latching gates for public and private pools statewide.
- Reinforce the need for constant adult supervision for children engaging in water-related activities by an individual who can swim and is knowledgeable in basic rescue techniques, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Raise and promote awareness of indoor safety devices which can help delay a toddler's access to dangers in the home include: baby gates and door-knob covers as barriers to bathrooms, kitchens, garages, and toilet cover locks.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to consistently use U.S. Coast Guard-approved Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) for themselves and their children when involved in water-related recreational activities.

RESOURCES:

American Academy of Pediatrics

<http://www.aap.org/family/tippool.htm>

The Medical Center of Central Georgia

<http://www.mccg.org/childrenshealth/safety/waterhub.asp>

American Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org/services/bss/tips/healthtips/safetywater.html>

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/chdrown.html>

Children's Safety Network

<http://www.childrenssafetynetwork.org/>

National Safety Council

<http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/drown.htm>

U.S. Coast Guard, Office of Boating Safety

<http://www.uscgboating.org/>

The United States Lifesaving Association

<http://www.usla.org/index.html>

Adapted from "Clear Danger: A National Study of Childhood Drowning and Related Attitudes and Behaviors" at <http://www.safekids.org/>

For more information about childhood drowning in Georgia, call (404) 657-6335.

Georgia Department of Human Resources

Office of Communications

www.dhr.georgia.gov

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