

Water Safety for Children

by John Voth, MD

Family Medicine Specialist, Colorado Springs Health Partners, PC

Summertime means fun at the pool, the lake, and the water park. Being safe in the water is as important as wearing a helmet while bike riding, or using a car seat when traveling. Drowning continues to be the second leading cause of unintentional injury and death for children in the US between the ages of 1 and 19 (half of these deaths are children 1 to 4 years old). Parents can help prevent injury and death near water.

Supervision

While most adults agree that supervision is important, many do not realize that answering the phone, reading, or doing chores is too distracting. Drownings often happen quickly, with little noise to alert parents that the child is in danger. Leaving a child unattended for less than 5 minutes can be too long to prevent an accident.

- **Never** leave a child unattended in or near water – even for just a minute.
- If several children are in the water, be sure there are several supervisors charged with watching over them. Supervisors should stay within an arm's length of any child who cannot swim.
- "Swimmies" and other plastic play floats do not provide adequate protection. Do not rely on these to keep your child safe.

Precautions

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children begin formal swimming lessons at age 4, although children as young as 24 months may gain some benefit from developing comfort in the water. Supervisors, parents and others around children in the water should receive CPR training. At any pool, be sure appropriate emergency equipment is available, such as a shepherd's hook, ladders, approved flotation devices, etc.

- A four sided fence installed around a residential pool can prevent children from wandering. Pool covers and alarms are helpful, but cannot replace the safety a fence provides.
- Even small amounts of water, such as in a kiddie pool or bathtub, can pose a risk. **Young children can drown in less than 2 inches of water.**
- Remove toys from the pool when the children are finished so that they are not tempted to try to retrieve them later.

Emergencies

Drownings are not nearly as common in areas where lifeguards are available. If your children swim at a



Children can easily slip through inflatable floaters. They should only be used as water toys only, **not** as a method to protect children who cannot swim.

continued next page

pool that is not attended by a lifeguard, make sure there is adult supervision at all times. Survival depends on a quick rescue and restarting breathing as soon as possible.

If your child is missing:

- Check the pool FIRST, then check rest rooms, snack bar, parking lots, etc.

If your child is found in the pool unconscious:

- Immediately remove the child from the water, while calling out loudly for help
- If the child is not breathing, check to ensure the air passages are clear, and immediately administer CPR.

To find out about CPR classes, check www.americanheart.org. Learning CPR is a good idea for parents as well as any other person who cares for children.

Make sure your children are safe while they have fun in the water, and don't forget the sunscreen!



John Voth, MD
Family Practitioner
CSHP Rockrimmon
branch

6025 Delmonico Drive
535-0648

