



American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

Water Safety

Drownings rank behind only motor-vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death among youngsters in middle childhood. Most often, these tragedies occur when children swim without adequate adult supervision. In most cases, these children (and their parents) have overestimated their swimming ability and their knowledge of water-survival skills.

Here are some guidelines to keep your middle-years child safe in and near the water:

- Make sure your youngster (older than age 4) learns how to swim from an experienced and qualified instructor. Check for available lessons at local recreation centers, YMCAs and summer camps.
- Never allow your child to swim alone or play by or in water away from the watchful eye of an adult. Ideally, this adult should be trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Also, teach your child to use the buddy system even when swimming with large groups of friends.
- Do not allow your child to engage in horseplay that might result in injury.
- Prohibit your child from diving unless someone has already determined the depth of the water and checked for underwater hazards.
- Do not allow your child to swim in areas where there are boats or fishermen. Nor should he/she swim at beaches where there are large waves, a powerful undertow or no lifeguards. Make sure he/she understands that swimming in one body of water (e.g., a backyard pool) may be different from swimming in a river or ocean.
- Do not permit your child to rely on an air mattress, inner tube or inflatable toy as a life preserver. If these devices deflate, or your child slips off them, he/she could be in serious trouble.
- If your pool has a cover, remove it completely before swimming. Also, never allow your child to walk on the pool cover; water may have accumulated on it, making it as dangerous as the pool itself. Your child also could fall through it and become trapped underneath.
- Keep a safety ring with a rope beside the pool at all times. If possible, have a phone in the pool area with emergency numbers clearly marked.
- Spas and hot tubs are dangerous for young children who can easily drown or become overheated in them. Don't allow young children to use these facilities.
- Your child should always wear a life preserver when he/she swims or rides in a boat. A life preserver fits properly if you can't lift it off over your child's head after he's been fastened into it. For the child younger than age 5, particularly the non-swimmer, it also should have a flotation collar to keep the head upright and the face out of the water.
- Your child should never be permitted to swim during a lightning storm.

- If you have a backyard swimming pool, it should be enclosed with high and locked fences on all four sides, especially the side that separates the house from the pool.
- When your youngster is old enough - usually by his/her high school years – he/she should learn life-saving skills such as CPR, taught in most cities through community agencies or the American Red Cross.

Younger children are often drawn to water as well. For these children, water can be especially hazardous. To ensure your child's safety, keep the rules above in mind and also take note of these additional tips for younger children.

- Be aware of small bodies of water your child might encounter, such as fishponds, ditches, fountains, rain barrels, watering cans and even the bucket you use when you wash the car. Children are drawn to places and things like these and need constant supervision to be sure they don't fall in.
- Children, who are swimming, even in a shallow toddler's pool, should be watched by an adult, preferably one who knows CPR. Inflatable pools should be emptied and put away after each play session.

Although swimming classes for young children are widely available, the American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend them for children younger than age 4 for two reasons:

1. You may be lulled into being less cautious because you think your child can swim.
2. Young children who are repeatedly immersed in water may swallow so much of it that they develop water intoxication. This can result in convulsions, shock and even death.

If you do enroll a child younger than 4 years old in a swimming program, particularly a "Daddy-" or "Mommy-and-me" class, think of it primarily as an opportunity to enjoy playing in the water together. Be sure the class you choose adheres to guidelines established by the national YMCA. Among other things, these guidelines forbid submersion of young children and encourage parents to participate in all activities. When your child reaches 4 years of age, you may want to teach him/her to swim so he'll/she'll feel more comfortable in and around water. But remember that even a child who knows how to swim needs to be watched constantly.