

DROWNING PREVENTION AND WATER SAFETY

More than 3,500 people die in drowning accidents every year in the U.S.¹ Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death in children 1-14 years old². In addition, for every drowning death of a child, five other kids need care at emergency departments for near-drownings¹. Childhood drowning is a tragedy, but can be avoided by being prepared, knowing what to do, and learning what you don't know.

KEY FACTS

- <1 year olds are most likely to drown at home.
- 1-4 year olds are most likely to drown in a swimming pool.
- 5-17 year olds are most likely to drown in a natural body of water.
- Two-thirds of childhood drowning deaths occur in May through August
- Boys are far more likely to drown; 82% of childhood (0-17 years) drowning incidents are of boys.
- Racial differences in drowning are large and increase with age. The drowning rate of African-American boys ages 5-17 is almost 4.5 times that of Caucasian boys³.
- Half of boat-related drownings could be prevented if individuals were wearing life jackets⁴

PREVENTION

- Learn how to recognize drowning and what to do if you see it.
- Teach children how to swim, about basic water safety, and about the buddy system.
- Supervise children in/around the water at all times; drowning can occur within minutes.
- Put in fences or other barriers in order to prevent unsupervised access to pools or bodies of water.
- Learn CPR and water rescue skills.
- Make children wear life-jackets and keep an emergency flotation ring and telephone near the pool.
- Consider medical conditions such as epilepsy before swimming.
- Watch for weather such as storms or long exposure to heat and sun.
- Be a good role model. For example, don't drink alcohol around the water and wear life-jackets.

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF DROWNING AND ACT

When it comes to saving a drowning child, every second counts, so know the signs in order to recognize when it is happening:

- Head low in the water, mouth at water level
- Head tilted back with mouth open
- Eyes glassy and empty, unable to focus
- Eyes closed
- Hair over forehead or eyes
- Not using legs - vertical
- Breathing very quickly or loudly; gasping
- Trying to swim in one direction but not moving that way
- Trying to roll over on the back
- Seems to be climbing an invisible ladder

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. Available from: URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars>

² www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/drowning/drowning_prevention_guide/en/

³ www.safekids.org/research-report/keeping-kids-safe-and-around-water-exploring-misconceptions-lead-drowning

⁴ Cummings P, Mueller BA, Quan L. Association between wearing a personal floatation device and death by drowning among recreational boaters: a matched cohort analysis of United States Coast Guard data. *Injury Prevention* 2011;17:156-159.14.

If you notice these signs and believe that someone is drowning, get them out of the water right away. Then, check to see if they are breathing; if they are not, begin CPR (see below). If you are not alone, tell someone nearby to call 911 or find help. Any near-drowning incident requires a full medical examination, even if the individual looks alright⁵.

OTHER DANGERS

Rip Currents, often known as Riptides are strong channels of water that can pull you away from shore. If caught in a rip current:

- Don't fight the current!
- Swim parallel to the shore until out of the current, then swim back towards shore
- Draw attention to yourself: wave your arms, shout towards shore⁶

Drowning individuals are dangerous, and can cause death in those attempting to save them by climbing on to their rescuers and pulling them under the water;

- If conscious, attempt to reach them from out of the water first, using anything to extend your reach.
- If that isn't possible, try throwing them a ring or other flotation device
- If you need to enter the water to save them, bring a flotation device and attempt to maintain a safe distance from the victim. One could use a towel to tow the victim out of the water.
- If not conscious, these precautions don't apply. A rescuer should get the victim out of the water immediately⁷

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Swim lessons, CPR/AED certification, and lifeguard training can improve one's readiness in the event of an emergency. Choose from options below or other local opportunities to sign your child up for swimming lessons and/or be trained in CPR/AED or Lifeguarding:

- [American Red Cross](#)
- [American Heart Association](#)
- [YMCA Massachusetts](#)
- [American Lifeguard Association](#)

OTHER RESOURCES

Check out some of these other resources for more information on what you can do to prevent drowning:

For parents and other caregivers

- [Drowning Prevention Info for Parents](#) from HealthyChildren.org
- [Drowning Prevention Foundation](#)
- [Persistent Misconceptions that Lead to Drowning](#) from SafeKids.org
- [Home Safety: Keeping Children Safe from Birth Through Kindergarten](#) – from the MMS
- [Water Safety](#) – from the American Red Cross

For organizations:

- [Preventing Drowning: An Implementation Guide](#) – from the World Health Organization
- [Model Aquatic Health Code](#) – from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



MASSACHUSETTS
MEDICAL SOCIETY

Every physician matters, each patient counts.

800-322-2303 x7373 or dph@mms.org

⁵ www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Drowning.aspx

⁶ www.usla.org/?page=RIPCURRENTS

⁷ www.scouting.org/filestore/Outdoor%20Program/Aquatics/pdf/430-505.pdf