

Water Safety for Children with Epilepsy or Seizures

Children with epilepsy or seizures have a much greater risk of drowning than other children. This is especially true for children 5 years of age or older. The most common place where children and adults with epilepsy drown is in a bathtub. Swimming pools are also places where seizures are likely to lead to drowning. Most drowning events are silent and happen within minutes. Here are some ways to keep your child safe around water.



Bath time

- Regardless of age, someone with epilepsy should never take a bath alone.
- Stay in the bathroom at all times with young children who are in the bathtub.
- Start training young children to shower by using a handheld sprayer in the bathtub with no water and the drain open.
- When children are old enough to want to bathe alone, they should shower, not take baths.
- Keep the bathroom door unlocked and open.
- If your child falls often during seizures, consider using a tub seat with a safety strap.

Swimming

- Enroll your child in swimming lessons. Tell the teacher your child has epilepsy or seizures.

- Swim with your child, or require that your child be with someone who swims well enough to help if your child has a seizure while in the water.
- Make sure that your child swims in a supervised pool. If your child has poorly controlled seizures, tell the life guard.
- Avoid swimming in open water, like lakes or rivers, unless your child is well supervised and wearing a life vest.
- Have your child wear a brightly colored swimsuit and life vest so she is easier to see.

Boating

- Always have your child wear a life vest when on a boat, raft, dock or close to water.
- Make sure that other adults in the boat wear a life vest as well to set an example and be better prepared in an emergency.
- Have your child sit down in a boat, not on the edge.
- If you can, carry a cellular phone in case of emergency.

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Other water safety tips

- Check your home for drowning hazards, such as ponds, pools, cisterns and buckets.
- Keep the toilet lid down.
- Keep the bathroom door closed (except during a bath or shower).
- Set the water temperature low so a child won't be scalded.
- Make sure shower and bath drains run quickly and are unobstructed.
- Make sure your child is supervised at all times in a hot tub.
- Be on alert when using buckets, and never leave them out when they contain fluid.
- Have your child wear a life vest when near ponds, lakes, rivers or the ocean.
- Learn CPR.
- Ask your child's nurse or doctor for special tips to keep your child safe around water.
- Check whether your child's seizures are under sufficient control to allow swimming.

If a seizure occurs in the water

- Support your child's head and keep her face out of the water.
- Bring her to the shore or side of the pool, and place her on her side.
- Check her airway and breathing. If breathing is labored or noisy or your child is not alert, call for emergency medical treatment.
- Give CPR if needed.

References

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- Kemp AM, Sibert JR. Epilepsy in children and the risk of drowning. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*. 1993.
- Orlowski JP, Rothner AD, Lueders H. Submersion accidents in children with epilepsy. *American Journal Disabled Child*. 1982.
- Ryan CA, Dowling G. Drowning deaths in people with epilepsy. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 1993.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Children's Resource Line (206) 987-2500 or (866) 987-2500 toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- Your Child's Health Care Provider

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.