

Stay On Top Of It

Water Safety for Children Birth to 5 Years

For this age group, drowning most often occurs in swimming pools and bathtubs. Parents may think that if their child falls in the water they will hear lots of splashing and noise and they will be able to get to their child. In most cases, children slip under quickly and in silence.

Supervision and a life jacket are the two most important things you can provide to protect your child from drowning.

At home

Babies and young children can drown in as little as two inches of water. Hundreds of children have drowned in bathtubs, garden ponds, toilets and five-gallon buckets.

- Always watch toddlers when in the bathroom.
- Never leave a baby or toddler alone in the bath or have a sibling watch a small child.
- Store buckets empty and out of reach when not in use.

In the yard

- Keep garbage cans covered.
- Store buckets empty and out of reach.
- Avoid having a garden pond. If you do have one, put a fence around it to keep your child away.
- Empty the wading pool when not in use.

In and near the water

Start good water safety habits early, while it's easier.

- Put your child in a life jacket when playing in or near the water, on a dock or in a boat, raft or inner tube.
- In all types of water, stay within touching distance of your child at all times.
- At social events, take turns with other adults being the "water watchers" to watch children near the water.
- While watching children near water, avoid doing things that could distract you such as talking, reading or talking on the phone.
- Buy a life jacket for your child. There may not always be one to rent or borrow. Some swim suits come with built in life jackets. It is a good idea to check the label on this type of suit since some are not U.S. Coast Guard approved.
- Infant and toddler water classes promote water safety and play, but they do not replace supervision. Children are ready for swim lessons at about age four.
- Teach your child to wait for your "OK" before getting into the water.
- Choose areas with lifeguards for swimming and playing. Even with a lifeguard, you will need to watch closely.
- Water wings, rafts or plastic rings are not designed to keep swimmers safe. Never use them in place of a life jacket.

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If you have a pool

Mishaps can happen just outside your door, so reduce your child's access to water. All pools pose a drowning risk. Soft-sided inflatable pools have the same risks as in-ground pools. Young children can get into them with ease and have trouble getting out.

Protect your child by using barriers with pools, hot tubs and spas. Barriers include a fence or wall, alarms and safety covers.

- Enclose pools on all four sides with a fence at least four feet high, with an entrance that has a locking gate.
- Add a power safety cover, alarms on doors leading to the pool and a pool alarm.
- Learn infant and child CPR.
- Cover hot tubs when not in use.
- If your child has long hair, use hair bands to keep hair away from the suction drain covers in pools or hot tubs.
- Keep rescue equipment and a phone right by the pool, with emergency phone numbers posted nearby.
- Remove toys from in and around the pool when it is not in use. Toys attract children to the pool.

TO LEARN MORE

- 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.