

Preventing Drowning: What You Should Know

How common is drowning?

Almost 4,000 Americans die each year from drowning. It is the most common injury-related cause of death for children one to four years of age. Many drownings can be prevented by taking simple safety steps and with education.

How can I prevent drowning?

There are many steps that you can take to prevent drowning:

- **Learn how to swim.** Children and adults who can't swim should take swimming lessons.
- **Take a CPR class.** CPR, or cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CAR-dee-oh-PULL-muh-nary re-SUSS-uh-TAY-shun), is a technique to use on people who are not breathing. It is done by giving compressions (pushing hard and fast) on a person's chest and breathing into his or her nose or mouth. It can mean the difference between life and death.
- **Protect small children.** Toddlers can drown in buckets of water, shallow baths, and toilets. Always pour out buckets of water. Put a latch on toilet seats. Stay within arm's reach of children in the bathtub, pool, or hot tub, or at the beach. Don't use swimming aids like inflatable arm bands (water wings) or bath stands to prevent your child from drowning. Don't let yourself be distracted by talking with others or using your cell phone. Don't drink alcohol while supervising children around

water. If your child can't swim, you need to be in the water next to him or her.

- **Put a fence around a backyard pool.** The fence should go around the entire pool. It should be at least 4 feet high and not climbable (for instance, not chain link). The gate latch should be out of reach of small children, so at least 58 inches high. Pool alarms and covers don't reliably prevent drowning. Don't let these devices give you a false sense of security.
- **Use caution at the beach.** Only swim at beaches with lifeguards. If you get caught in a rip current, don't swim against it. Swim along the beach until the rip current is gone, and then swim to shore. Or, signal the lifeguard that you are in trouble by waving and calling for help. Watch the following video: <http://www.ripcurrents.com/>.
- **Wear life jackets while boating.** All passengers should wear properly fitting Coast Guard-approved life jackets all the time.
- **Don't drink alcohol or use drugs.** You should never drink alcohol or use drugs while swimming, boating, or supervising children around water.
- **Be careful around rivers, lakes, and ponds.** Moving water is more powerful than it looks. It can trap even strong swimmers underwater. You cannot always tell how deep water is by looking at it, even if it's clear. Go in slowly, feet first, until you know for sure how deep it is.



Preventing Drowning *(continued)*

Where can I get more information?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Water-Safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html>

Consumer Product Safety Commission
<http://www.cpsc.gov/en/Safety-Education/Neighborhood-Safety-Network/Toolkits/Drowning-Prevention/>

Drowning Prevention Foundation
<http://drowningpreventionfoundation.com/>

National Drowning Prevention Alliance
<http://ndpa.org/>

Safe Kids Worldwide
<http://www.safekids.org/watersafety>

U.S. Coast Guard (life jacket information)
<http://www.uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/life-jacket-wear-wearing-your-life-jacket.php>

April 2016

Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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