

WATER SAFETY

Drowning accounts for about 4000 fatal deaths in the U. S. per year. It is the leading cause of accidental death for children

under the age of five. Some risk factors for drowning include the inability to swim, or an overestimation of swimming

ability, as well as risk taking behavior (especially in teenage boys), and the use of alcohol and illicit drugs.

There are many things parents can do to improve their child's safety in and around water. According to Jeffrey Weiss, M.D.,

FAAP, "parents need to provide layers of protection for their children."

The first and most obvious is learning to swim. Developmentally, children are ready for swim lessons around 4 years of age, although not every

child is ready at the same age. There is also some evidence that children between the ages of 1 and 4 are less likely to drown if they have had formal

swimming instruction, but the American Academy of Pediatrics is not recommending mandatory swim lessons for this age group. Consideration of a

child's frequency of water exposure, emotional development, and physical capabilities all need to be taken into consideration when deciding if a child

is ready to learn how to swim.

There is no substitute for constant adult supervision of children around pools or any body of water including lakes, streams, waterfalls, drainage ditches,

rivers, and the ocean. So even if your child "knows how to swim," vigilance around water is of utmost importance. Parents are instructed to NEVER

leave a child unattended near a body of water.

Formal CPR instruction for parents is also recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). You can contact your local Red Cross or American Heart Association to inquire about CPR classes.

A fence that surrounds a pool on all side's cuts drowning risk in half; however, laws about fencing vary depending on where the pool is located. Small

inflatable pools present a drowning risk because they are exempt from building codes. It is very easy for young children to lean over the soft edges of

these pools and fall in. Remember, drowning can take place in very shallow bodies of water.

As mentioned before, drug or alcohol use can contribute to accidental drowning in the teen group, even if the child is able to swim.

For more information about water safety, go to the AAP website for parents: www.healthychildren.org and type water safety into the search box.