Drowning & Water Hazards

Drowning is one of the quickest and most silent causes of death or irreversible injury, but also one of the most preventable safety hazards with active supervision and the installation of simple barriers. When a child becomes submerged in water, even if the child survives, irreversible brain damage can occur in a very short time resulting in long-term disabilities, memory problems, learning delays, and permanent loss of basic physical capabilities.

On average, about 3,500 injuries to children occur annually due to a near-drowning incident, and about 800 children under 15 die each year from unintentional drowning according to the National Center for Health Statistics and the National Center for Injury Prevention. Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death among children between 1 and 4 years old.\(^1\) According to the CPSC, approximately 115 children drown from other hazards in the home besides pools and about two-thirds occur in bathtubs. CPSC reports that children younger than age 5 represent more than 75 percent of all pool and spa submersion deaths in the United States. Children between the ages of 1 and 3 represented 67 percent of reported fatalities and 64 percent of injuries.\(^2\)

Children can drown in just a few inches of water and drowning is commonly a silent death. There is no splashing to alert anyone that the child is in trouble. Layers of protection are very important in preventing drowning. Parents need to be particularly vigilant in warmer months when pools (and other outdoor water risks) are more likely to be in frequent use. It is also recommended that parents learn CPR. In a situation where seconds count, CPR performed quickly by bystanders has been shown to improve outcomes for drowning victims.

**Inside the Home**

- Young children must NEVER be left alone in a bathtub, even for a moment. The majority of infant (less than 1 year old) drowning deaths happen in bathtubs, large buckets or toilets. Not yet highly mobile, most of the infants who have drowned in these situations have been momentarily left alone in a bathtub.
  - Young children should never be left in the care of another young child during a bath.
  - Parents should always keep a baby within arm’s reach.
  - Many infants have drowned during a momentary lapse of supervision where the parent or caregiver left to get a towel, answer the phone, or greet a visitor at the door.
    - If a phone or door must be answered during bath time, there should be a cordless phone in the bathroom before the bath begins, or the baby must be removed from the water before answering the phone or door.
    - All necessary supplies (such as towels) should be gathered within reach before filling the tub.
  - The tub should only be filled as much as required for bathing the infant.
  - The tub should be completely emptied before the parent leaves the room when bath time is finished. Children have drowned in tubs while the water is draining.
  - If a bath seat is used, it is designed to only provide a helping hand. It will not prevent an infant from drowning. Parents should carefully review the manufacturer’s instructions and warnings.
Buckets of liquid should never be left accessible to children. In particular, large 5 gallon buckets have been the source of numerous drownings. It is difficult for top-heavy infants to free themselves if they become inverted in such objects.

According to the CPSC, toilets are often overlooked as a drowning hazard in the home.
- Toilets should be latched with toilet locks. It is difficult for top-heavy toddlers to free themselves if they fall headfirst into a toilet and children are drawn to explore areas where water is present.
- Bathrooms doors should be kept closed and latched to prevent access to young children.

Additional risks for childhood drownings include coolers, sinks and fish tanks.

**Pools and Spas**
- Statistics from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) show that the most likely victims of drowning in a residential swimming pool are children between 1 and 5 years old. Over 50% of these deaths occur in the child’s own home pool, and another 30% in the pool of a neighbor, friend or family member. Less than 10% occur in public pools.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), among children ages 1 to 4, most drownings occur in home swimming pools.
- The *National Safe Kids Campaign: Clear Danger* publication reported that, in approximately 90% of pool submersions, a parent or care-giver believed they were adequately supervising the child at the time.
- In addition to pools, drownings occur in spas/hot tubs, canals, ponds, streams, oceans and fountains.
- Layers of protection are needed to keep children from all potential drowning sources.
  - Installation of pool and waterway fences should be one of these layers.
  - Barriers such as pool fencing should be used to help prevent young children from gaining access to the pool area without caregivers’ awareness. Numerous studies have confirmed that four-sided isolation fencing around home pools could prevent 50 to 90 percent of childhood drownings and near-drownings.
  - There is an 83% reduction in the risk of childhood drowning with a four-sided isolation pool fence, compared to three-sided property-line fencing.
  - When used properly, door locks, door alarms, pool alarms, automatic pool covers, and self-closing self-latching gates add extra layers of protection. These devices should be used in conjunction with four-sided fencing and should not be a substitute for four-sided fencing.
- Children have drowned because they became entrapped under water by pool or hot tubs drains.
  - Pools and hot tubs should be inspected by a professional for entrapment hazards and should be kept up-to-date with devices to help prevent drain entrapment.
  - Learn more about unsafe drains by visiting this [resource](http://resources).
- CPR skills are important to learn and be ready to use at any moment. Survival depends on rescuing a child quickly and restarting the breathing process, even while the child is still in the water. Seconds count in preventing death or brain damage.
- If a child is ever missing, even momentarily, look in a nearby pool or other water location first.
- Keep a cordless phone and a safety pole by the pool.
• Parents should always stay within arm’s reach of a young child who cannot swim. Lifeguards are really only present for emergency/backup purposes. Parents must always serve as the primary supervisors. This role should never be delegated to a child or a device. Never use flotation devices as a substitute for supervision.
• At parties, be clear in your communication with regard to who is in charge of watching children near any water hazard. The supervising parent(s) should always be within arm’s reach of the child/children.
• Even small pools such as wading pools are a hazard. Wading pools should be emptied when you are finished swimming.
• Children should be taught how to swim at as early an age as possible and they should not be considered independently “water-safe” at any age and should never swim alone. Participation in formal swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning by 88% among children aged 1 to 4 years.
• Many communities have enacted safety regulations governing residential swimming pools.

**Natural Bodies of Water**
• Again, layers of protection are needed to keep children from all potential drowning sources.
• Life jackets are critical for children participating in activities in the water.
• No one should ever swim alone.

**Resources:**

www.poolsafely.gov *

http://www.safekids.org/watersafety


Please review these after the test to broaden your knowledge or use as resources in your educational programs.

*Key Resource