R ADAMS COWLEY SHOCK TRAUMA CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

PREVENTION **MATTERS**

THE CENTER FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND POLICY

# Water Safety Awareness

Summer is a time when millions of us like to kick back and enjoy some recreation. Swimming is one of the most popular summer activities. **Along with the fun comes the responsibility to make water safety a priority.**

**Each day in the U.S., 9 people die from drowning (not including boating-related incidents).** Unintentional drowning is the single leading cause of injury death in people aged 1-4 (CDC, 2016). It's not just young children at risk -- teens and young adults are also vulnerable.

## WATER SAFETY QUIZ (SOURCE: SAFEKIDS.ORG)

1. **Children can drown in as little as:**
   a. One inch of water
   b. Three inches of water
   c. Six inches of water
   d. One foot of water
2. **Which of the following items are designed to keep a child from drowning:**
   a. Air-filled water wings
   b. Life jacket
   c. Pool noodle
   d. All of the above
3. **It is okay for your child to not wear a life jacket in a boat if:**
   a. He or she is a good swimmer
   b. An adult is present
   c. There are no life jackets on the boat
   d. None of the above
4. **True or False: A bystander will usually hear splashing or screaming if a child were drowning.**
   a. True
   b. False
5. **Who should learn to swim?**
   a. All people over 6 months of age
   b. Only people who are not afraid of water.
   c. All children over 4 years of age
   d. Swimming lessons are fun but not that important.

ANSWERS ON REVERSE SIDE

### Home Pool Safety

- Pools should be surrounded with a 4-foot high fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate. Consider using a safety cover on the pool when it is not in use. In addition, a safety alarm can alert you if anyone enters the pool.
- Maintain proper chemical levels and filtration in your pool. Conduct regular tests and adjust chemicals as needed to minimize the risk of exposure.
- Don't allow people to go in the water unless they know how to swim.
- Don't allow people to swim alone.
- Establish rules for safe behaviors such as "no diving," "stay away from drain covers" and "walk please." Do not allow swimmers to engage in horseplay (pushing or jumping).
- Supervise children AT ALL TIMES. Never leave a young child alone near the water and teach children to ask permission to go near the water. Remember that lifeguards and swimming lessons are no substitution for adult supervision.
- Make sure to designate at least one adult as the "water watcher" who will supervise children without distraction.
- Have young children or inexperienced swimmers wear U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets around the water. Remember that you must still supervise these swimmers.
- If a child is missing, check the water first.
- Have the appropriate safety equipment nearby and encourage people to learn CPR and other rescue techniques.

### Safety Tips for Ocean, Lake and River Swimming

- Ocean swimming takes different skills. Only swim in lifeguard-protected areas. Obey all rules and instructions from the lifeguard.
- Never swim alone, even if you're a good swimmer. Make sure you have enough energy to return to the shore.
- Use caution when swimming as there may be currents.
- Cold water and currents can challenge even the strongest swimmers. If you get caught in a current, relax and float or swim parallel to the shore until you are free.
- Enter the water **feet first** and don't dive in unfamiliar areas.
- Avoid areas that contain water plants and animals. If you do encounter an animal, leave it alone.
- Don't drink alcohol (alcohol is involved in 50% of male teen drownings).

### Additional Water Safety Tips for Parents of Young Children

- Always supervise your children; never leave them alone in a pool or bathtub. Babies can drown in as little as 1 inch of water. Empty the water immediately after the bath.
- Enroll your children in swimming lessons at an early age (risk of drowning decreased by 88% in children aged 1-4 who took swimming lessons). Even babies can begin classes (with an adult) at 6 months of age.
- Make sure kids learn these 5 water survival skills:
  - Jump into water over their heads and return to the surface.
  - Float or tread water for 1 full minute.
  - Turn around in a full circle and find an exit.
  - Swim 25 yards to exit the water.
  - Exit the water. If in a pool, use a ladder to exit.
- Use toilet seat locks to prevent drowning.
- Keep doors to bathrooms and laundry rooms closed.

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### Safety Tips for Water Sports

- **Boating.** Approximately 86% of boating-related deaths occur with operators who had **no formal boating safety class**. The key factors behind accidents are: operator inattention/inexperience, improper lookout, machinery failure and speeding. No one should operate a boat under the influence of alcohol. All boaters should take an approved boating safety course. Everyone onboard a boat should wear an approved lifejacket. Boaters should exercise extreme caution when swimmers are present; the boat's propeller can cause severe injury or death to a swimmer.
- **Jet Skis.** All jet skiers should wear an approved life jacket and a watercraft helmet to protect against head injuries. Jet skiers should not speed or be under the influence of alcohol. Even if not required by law, jet skiers should take an approved boating safety course.
- **White Water Rafting.** Rafters should work with a professional rafting outfitter and properly trained guides. Proper safety gear should be worn including a life jacket, helmet and appropriate outerwear. Ideally, rafters should stay in the boat but they should be comfortable in the water and able to swim. Most importantly, all rafters should listen to their guide and follow all instructions.
- **Shallow Diving.** Diving into shallow water can cause devastating injuries to the spinal cord. About 80% of these injuries occur in males. Prior to diving, swimmers should verify that the water is at least 10-12 feet deep. The first time you enter the water, you should go **feet first**. No one should ever dive into an above-ground pool.

### Quiz Answers:

- **Q1.** **A is the correct answer.** Children can drown in as little as one inch of water. Never leave them alone around water.
- **Q2.** **B is the correct answer.** A life jacket approved by the U.S. Coast Guard is the only item designed to keep a child from drowning. Do not rely on these other items.
- **Q3.** **D is the correct answer.** It is never okay to let your child ride in a boat without a proper life jacket.
- **Q4.** **False is the correct answer.** Most drownings occur quickly and silently and many have occurred with even a brief lapse in supervision. Supervise children at all times around the water.
- **Q5.** **A is the correct answer.** All people over 6 months of age should take swimming lessons. Children and adults of all ages can also benefit from swimming lessons.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Water Safety Tips: nationalwatersafetymonth.org/water-safety-tips
Wear It, Safe Boating Campaign: safeboatingcampaign.com
Pool Safely: poolsafely.gov

### FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

The Center for Injury Prevention and Policy, visit umm.edu/CIPP
STC Prevention Matters, visit umm.edu/PreventionMatters