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## Keep Your Family Safe from Unintentional Drowning

Temperatures in the state are rising and residents are seeking relief in swimming pools, lakes and along local beaches. While fun in the water is necessary during the summertime, it is also important to be mindful of swimming dangers and unintentional drowning.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines drowning as the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid. Two-thirds of drowning deaths occur in the summer, between May and August, and most commonly on the weekends.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about ten people die from unintentional drowning every day in the U.S., with two of them children aged 14 or younger. Age is one of the major risk factors for drowning, with children under the age of 5 having the highest rate of drowning rates worldwide, mostly due to a lack of proper supervision. However, age is not the only risk factor. Gender plays a large role, with males account for nearly 80% of drowning fatalities. Studies show that men are more exposed to water and exhibit riskier behavior such as swimming alone and drinking alcohol before swimming and boating. Access to water is also a risk factor, including individuals with occupations such as commercial fishing or those who use small boats in low-income countries. Children who live near open water sources, such as ditches, ponds, irrigation channels, or pools are especially at risk. Other risk factors may include the following: lack of swimming ability, lack of barriers, failure to wear life jackets, alcohol use and seizure disorders. For individuals that have seizure disorders, the bathtub is the site of the highest drowning risk.

In order to minimize the likelihood of a drowning or near drowning in a swimming pool, a number of safety measures should be employed:

- Never leave a child unsupervised near a pool, and be sure young children in a pool are accompanied by an adult.
- Instruct babysitters about potential pool hazards, about the safety use of devices and the need for constant supervision.
- Do not swim when using alcohol or drugs
- Keep children away from pool filters
- Teach children to walk carefully around the pool, as running around the pool can cause falls and injuries
- Do not permit rough-housing and dunking, as they may lead to head injuries. Always check to see if other swimmers are nearby to avoid hitting them.
- Be sure diving is only allowed in in-ground pools, in the deep end of the pool.
- Remove steps and ladders from above ground pools when not in use.
- Keep tables, chairs, and anything else that could be used as staging to climb into the pool away from the sides of the pool.
- Never use a pool with its cover partially in place, as this could trap children; always completely remove the cover.
- Do not swim alone or in the dark.
- Stay out of the pool during thunderstorms.
- Keep a cell phone near the pool while it is being used.
- Do not allow eating or gum chewing in the pool, in order to avoid choking accidents.
- Keep basic life-saving equipment near the pool.
- Do not let swimmers play games underwater that include holding their breath for a long period of time.

Drowning has been referred to as a “silent death”, since so often there is no splashing or cry for help. Even when a child does thrash or yell, adults may not realize that the child is really in trouble because screaming and splashing are characteristic of playing in the water. However, swimming pools should be a source of fun and by routinely observing safe practices, they can be. For further information about swimming pool safety or accidental drowning, contact the Central Connecticut Health District at (860)721-2822 or by visiting [www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org).