

June 12, 2001

Practice Swimming Pool Safety to Avoid Accidental Drowning

As the end of the school year approaches and hot weather settles in, many people will turn to swimming pools for relief from the heat. Pools are not only a means of cooling off, they can be a source of great summer fun as well. But water can also be dangerous, especially for young children.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), approximately 300 children under 5 years of age drown in residential pools each year, and another 3000 children under 5 require hospital treatment for submersion accidents (some of which result in permanent brain damage). In fact, drowning is the 4th leading cause of death for children in that age group, and the 2nd leading cause of death for children under the age of 14. But swimming pools do not just pose a hazard for young children; people of all ages need to practice safety measures. Every year, 43,000 people are injured in accidents in and around swimming pools, and more than 600 people drown in home or public pools. The majority of child drownings occur in apartment or home swimming pools, and half of all pool fatalities result from incidents that occur in the yards of single-family homes.

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 baby sitters about potential pool hazards, about the use of safety devices, and the need for constant supervision.
- Do not swim when using alcohol or drugs.
- Keep children away from pool filters to avoid accidents resulting from the suction force which could keep a child from surfacing.
- Do not allow children or adults to swim immediately after eating; wait an hour after a meal before swimming.
- Be sure everyone using a pool walks carefully around the pool; running around the pool can lead to falls and injuries.
- Do not permit rough-housing and dunking; if someone is thrown into a pool, a head injury may result. Do not jump into the water without checking to see that no one is underneath, and avoid collisions with other swimmers.
- Be sure diving is only allowed in in-ground pools from that are deep enough to accommodate the dive. Dive only from the deep end, not from the sides, and never dive into an above ground 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.
- Completely fence in the area around the pool and install self-closing and self-latching gates. Never prop open a gate.

- 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 telephone near the pool when the pool is in use.
- Be sure CD players, radios, and other electrical devices are a safe distance from the water or wet surfaces.
- Do not allow eating or gum chewing in the pool in order to avoid choking accidents.
- Keep basic life-saving equipment near the pool.

Adults need to practice pool safety as much as children, but adults also have the added responsibility of keeping children safe as well. Drowning has been referred to as a “silent death,” since often there is no splashing or cry for help. Even when a child does thrash or yell, adults may not realize that a child is really in trouble since screaming and splashing are characteristic of children playing in the water. Drowning also occurs very quickly—77% of swimming pool accident victims had been missing for 5 minutes or less when they were found submerged or drowned. Since seconds count when a child is involved in a pool accident, supervising adults should always check the pool area first when a child is missing, even if the child was last seen in the house. A study of submersion accidents by the CPSC found that 69% of the children involved were last seen in the house, yard, porch, or patio; they were not expected to be at or in the pool. And parents of small children should be aware that most submersion accidents occurred in familiar surroundings; 65% of the incidents happened in the pools owned by the children’s families, and 33% occurred in a pool owned by friends or relatives.

Swimming pools should be a source of fun. By routinely observing safe practices, they can be. For further information about swimming pool safety or accidental drownings, contact the Central Connecticut Health District at 721-2822