

Practicing water safety

Each summer, the warm weather and inviting sun draw people to poolsides and beaches. Along with the fun, it's important to remember safety for you and your family.

There are thousands of needless deaths due to drowning each year. Exercising basic safety near any water source – particularly near pools, rivers, lakes, and the ocean – can ensure that summer fun doesn't unnecessarily turn into tragedy.

The good news is that the number of deaths due to drowning has been

decreasing in the United States in recent decades.

A study in the June 16, 1999, issue of *JAMA* investigated possible reasons for this decline in drowning deaths. The study shows that drowning-related deaths decreased by more than half from 1975 to 1995 in 1 region of the country (King County, Wash.). Researchers believe improvements in water safety and a decline in deaths due to alcohol use may have been major factors.

WATER SAFETY TIPS:

- Always wear a properly fitted, Coast Guard-approved life jacket when boating and fishing.
- Never drink alcoholic beverages and swim, because alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination.
- People who work or play around water should learn to swim.
- Always practice the "buddy system" and never swim alone.
- Only swim in supervised areas.
- Obey "No Diving" signs; enter feet first into water if you don't know the depth.
- It is wise to stop swimming or boating as soon as you hear or see a storm; water conducts electricity.

BEACH TIPS:

- Check for any special warning flags or check with a lifeguard for any potential hazards.
- Stay within the designated swimming area, preferably within sight of a lifeguard on duty.
- When swimming away from shore, make sure you save enough energy to swim back to shore.
- Avoid piers, pilings, and diving platforms when in the water; avoid patches of plants and leave aquatic life alone.



TO PROTECT CHILDREN:

- Never leave a child unsupervised around water, including a pool, wading pool, spa, bathtub, or even a 5-gallon bucket of water. Flotation devices are not a substitute for constant adult supervision.
- Completely enclose pools with a self-locking, self-closing fence with vertical bars.
- Keep basic life-saving equipment (such as a pole, rope, and a throwable personal flotation device – a life buoy or a "lifesaver") by the pool and know how to use it.
- If your child comes into frequent contact with bodies of water, enroll your child in a water safety course or swimming course.
- Empty water out of blow-up pools and put them away after each use.
- Parents should take a **cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR)** course, which teaches basic life-saving techniques in case someone stops breathing. Contact your local American Red Cross chapter to enroll in a CPR course.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American Red Cross Public Inquiry Office 703/248-4222 or www.redcross.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics *A Parent's Guide to Water Safety* www.aap.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm. A previous *JAMA* Patient Page on CPR was published on April 7, 1999.

Additional Sources: American Red Cross, American Academy of Pediatrics, AMA's Health Insight (www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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