

water safety

keeping kids safe in water

Kids need constant supervision around water — whether the water is in a bathtub, a wading pool, a swimming pool, the beach or a lake. Young children are especially vulnerable — they can drown in less than 2 inches (6 centimeters) of water. Always watch children closely when they're in or near any water.

Here are some tips for a fun and safe summer swim season:

- If you don't already, it's a good idea to learn how to swim. Kids older than 4 years should learn, too (check the local recreation center for classes taught by qualified instructors). Kids who between 1 and 4 might also benefit from swimming lessons, but check with your doctor first.
- Don't assume that a child who knows how to swim isn't at risk for drowning. All kids need to be supervised in the water, no matter what their swimming skill levels. Infants, toddlers, and weak swimmers should have an adult swimmer within arm's reach to provide "touch supervision."
- Invest in proper-fitting, Coast Guard-approved flotation devices (life vests). Use them whenever a child is near water. Check the weight and size recommendations on the label, then have your child try it on to make sure it fits snugly. For kids younger than 5 years old, choose a vest with a strap between the legs and head support — the collar will keep the child's head up and face out of the water. Inflatable vests and arm devices such as water wings are not effective protection against drowning.
- Don't forget the sunscreen and reapply frequently, especially if the kids are getting wet. UV sunglasses, hats and protective clothing can also help provide sun protection.
- Kids should drink plenty of fluids, particularly water, to prevent dehydration. It's easy to get dehydrated in the sun, especially when kids are active and sweating. Dizziness, feeling lightheaded or nausea are just some of the signs of dehydration and overheating.
- The temperature of the water is important, too. Recommended water temperatures vary depending on the activity, swimmer's age, and whether or not they are pregnant. In general, 82°-86°F (28°-30°C) is comfortable for recreational swimming for children (babies are more comfortable when the water is on the warmer side of this temperature range). Body temperature drops more quickly in water than on land, and it does not take long for hypothermia to set in. If a child is shivering or experiencing muscle cramps, get him or her out of the water immediately.



at lakes, ponds, parks or beaches

First, teach kids never to swim alone. Using the buddy system means there's always someone looking out for you. Make sure your kids understand that swimming in a pool is different from swimming in a lake or the ocean — there are different hazards for each.

at the lake or pond

- Don't let kids swim without adult supervision — lakes or ponds may be shallow near the bank and then increase in depth sharply further out from shore.
- Ponds and lakes may hide jagged rocks, broken glass, or trash.
- Make sure kids wear foot protection; even in the water, they should wear aqua socks or water shoes.
- Watch out for weeds and grass that could entangle a leg or arm.
- Most boating accidents, particularly among teenagers, are related to alcohol. When you and your family are boating, assign a designated driver who won't drink. Be sure teens know about the dangers of alcohol, on and off the water.

at the beach

- Teach kids to always swim when and where a lifeguard is on duty. They shouldn't swim close to piers or pilings because sudden water movements may cause swimmers to collide with them.
- Unlike the calm waters of a swimming pool, the beach has special dangers like currents and tides. Check with the lifeguard when you arrive to find out about the water conditions.
- Don't allow kids to swim in large waves or undertows, and tell them never to stand with their back to the water because a sudden wave can easily knock them over.
- Teach kids that if they're caught in a rip current or undertow, they should swim parallel to the shore or should tread water and call for a lifeguard's help.
- The stings of jellyfish or Portuguese man-of-wars can be painful, so tell kids to avoid them in the water and to tell an adult right away if they're stung.
- Whether at the lake or at the beach, teach your child to get out of the water during bad weather, especially lightning.

water park safety

Water parks can be a lot of fun for kids, as long as you keep safety in mind. Before you go, make sure the park is monitored by qualified lifeguards. Once there, read all posted signs before letting your child on any rides (many rides have age, height, weight, or health requirements, and each has a different depth of water).

Teach your kids to follow all rules and directions, such as walking instead of running and always going down the water slide in the right position — feet first and face up. A Coast-Guard approved life jacket is a good idea, too.

Know which rides are appropriate for your child's age and development. For example, wave pools can quickly go from calm to rough, putting even a good swimmer in over his or her head. Younger children can be intimidated by older kids' splashing and roughhousing.

Above all, supervise your kids at all times. Don't assume that just because your child took swimming lessons or is using a flotation device such as an inner tube or inflatable raft that there's no drowning risk. If you're at a party, it's especially easy to become distracted, so designate an adult who will be responsible for watching the children.

This information was provided by Dayton Children's Hospital. For more medically reviewed information written for parents, kids and teens visit childrensdayton.org. © 2016.