



Water Safety

For kids and summertime, nothing spells relief from the hot sun like a dip in the swimming pool. It's also a great deal of fun ... and that's what kids want after all.

And by practicing a few safety precautions, there's no need for this pleasant, relaxing and cooling summer activity to turn to tragedy. Common sense — and swimming lessons — are the keys.

"Anyone is at risk for drowning when they become careless or go in the water unprepared," says Dr. W. Scott Colliton, a pediatrician at Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. "It's important that parents take the time to go over a few swimming safety rules with their children before heading for the pool or lake."

Dr. Laura Fitzmaurice, chief of Emergency Medicine at Children's Mercy, says it only takes a couple inches of water and just a few minutes for children to drown. "That's why young children need constant supervision when they are near any kind of water," she says.

At Children's Mercy, more than 20 children a year are seen for near drownings. Some of those who recover suffer permanent damage. The following tips are offered for water safety:

- Sign up your child for swimming lessons from a certified teacher. Check with the Red Cross, YMCA or local park and recreation departments. These courses can give children basic swimming skills and teach them what to do in case of an emergency.
- Teach children to swim with a buddy, never alone. Buddies look out for each other and know what to do when their buddy is in trouble in the water.
- Teach your children to swim only in places where someone, usually a lifeguard, is watching.

- Beware of backyard pools, hot tubs or Jacuzzis in the neighborhood, especially those not fenced. Your child could wander off and accidentally fall in.
- Never let older children swim in unsupervised areas like quarries, canals or ponds. Older children are at risk of drowning when they overestimate their ability or underestimate how deep water is.
- Read the rules posted at beaches and pools. If your child is not sure about a rule, ask a lifeguard.
- Anytime there is lightning in the sky, keep your children away from the water. Water is one of the best conductors of electricity. Children in the pool when lightning strikes will be electrocuted.
- Inner tubes and floats are great water toys, but they should not be used for children who can't swim without their assistance. Don't count on these floats to keep your child's head above water.

By teaching your children these simple rules of swimming safety, your whole family can enjoy safe and fun times at the pool or beach this summer.