

Drowning

Drowning is a major cause of death among children under five years of age in California. Most drownings in this age group occur in home swimming pools, but others happen in water-filled bathtubs, wading pools, toilets, buckets or other containers.

Why are small children more at risk for drowning?

Young children are just learning to walk and explore, and they excel at getting out from under the watchful eye of their parents. And small children are top-heavy; they tend to fall forward and head first when they lose their balance. They do not have enough muscle development in their upper body to pull themselves up out of a bucket, toilet or bathtub, or for that matter, any body of water. This is why even a bucket containing only a few inches of water can be dangerous for a small child.

How long does it take for a drowning accident to happen?

A brief lapse in supervision is a common factor in most drownings. Of all young children who drown, 75 percent are missing from a caregiver's sight for less than five minutes. Drowning is silent and rapid, with brain damage occurring in only three to five minutes.

How can I prevent drowning accidents?

- Always provide careful and constant supervision of the children in your care.
- Never leave a child alone in or near a body of water (tub, shower, toilet, pool, or a bucket of water, a creek, river or irrigation ditch).

- If any container is used to hold water, empty the contents immediately after use and store out of children's reach and sight.
- Latch toilet seat covers when not in use.
- Instruct babysitters and guardians about potential water hazards.
- Learn CPR.

Pool safety tips for drowning prevention

- If you have a pool, it should be enclosed by a fence that is at least 5 feet high. The fence should have a self-closing, self-locking gate.
- Keep climbing equipment, chairs and tables away from pool fences. All the windows of your home which have access to the pool area should be screened securely.
- Supervise children in water, even if they have had swimming lessons or wear flotation devices. These do not eliminate the risk of drowning and may increase risk due to over-confidence and lack of fear and caution.
- Teach children water-safety behavior (no running in or around the pool area or going near a pool without an adult).
- Do not keep toys in or around the pool area when not in use.
- Keep a telephone with emergency numbers near the pool area.

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