



# Prevent Drowning

## What a child care provider needs to know

Drowning is a major cause of death among children under 5 years of age in California. Water safety presents a particular challenge to child care providers. Most drownings in this age group occur in home swimming pools. Water-filled bathtubs, wading pools, toilets, buckets or other containers are also places where young children can drown. Water safety presents its own set of challenges to the child care environment.

Children between the ages of 1 and 4 years are at greatest risk from drowning. These children are just learning to walk and explore. They excel at getting out from under the watchful eye of the provider.

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. Even a bucket containing only a few inches of water can be dangerous for a small child.

Wading in bodies of fresh water may carry the additional risk of injury from cuts, puncture wounds and infections. Standing bodies of water such as swimming pools, wading pools and hot tubs also have the potential for spreading disease, so they are not recommended for use with young children. Instead, the use of sprinklers is recommended.

## What a child care provider can do to reduce the risk of drowning

*Reduce water hazards and prevent access to water.*

Safety precautions must be taken to keep any water in the child care environment as risk-free as possible. Since any body of water poses a threat and young children can drown in as little as one inch of water, the outdoor environment should be thoroughly screened to detect hazards that may lead to the risk of drowning.

*Promote safe behaviors.*

Because children move quickly, are curious and do not understand their physical abilities, they must be watched carefully around even small bodies of water. The majority of drownings occur within a surprisingly short period of time. Never, ever, leave a child alone, even for a moment, when there is a body of water in the environment. When near water, always reinforce safety for the children. If the children are allowed to play in water, plan this activity for the time when they are least tired and most alert. Teach children safe practices for swimming and playing in the water to further protect them. Have a telephone within easy reach at all times. Never leave the area when children are present for a moment even to answer the phone.

*Learn proper response if there is a water emergency.*

Act immediately:

- Pull the child from the water and place child on his/her back.
- Check for breathing, and clear mouth and nose of any obstructions.
- Get another adult to call for emergency help.
- Begin rescue breathing or CPR as needed until the child is revived or help arrives.

## Preventing drownings

- Never leave a child alone in or near any body of water (tub, wading pools, shower, pool, water table or even a bucket).
- Latch toilet seat-covers down when not in use.
- Always provide careful, direct and constant supervision of young children if there is a body of water present in the environment.
- Never expect swimming instruction to eliminate the risk of drowning in children.
- Supervise children in the water even if they are wearing flotation devices. These devices are not substitutes for constant supervision.
- Any hazard should be enclosed with a fence that is at least five feet tall and not easy to climb. A door or sliding glass door is not a safe substitute for a fence.
- Gates should have locks that are at least 55 inches high and self-closing. Keep gate keys in a safe place away from children.
- Never leave pool covers partially in place because children can become trapped beneath them. Pool covers are not a substitute for fencing.
- Keep chairs, tables and climbing equipment away from pool fences to prevent children from climbing over the fence into the pool.
- Learn CPR and keep rescue equipment at poolside, including a life preserver, shepherd's crook and cordless telephone to call 9-1-1.
- If a portable wading pool is used in child care (although it is not recommended), it should be filled with water, used immediately, drained and put away as soon as children leave the pool.
- Never leave infants or children unattended around five-gallon buckets containing even a small amount of liquid. Empty buckets when not in use.
- Children with seizure disorders are particularly vulnerable to drowning. Know your children's medical history.
- Teach your children water safety behaviors:
  - Do not run, push or play around swimming areas.
  - Do not bring glass or bottles near swimming or wading areas.
  - Do not swim with anything in your mouth.
  - Do not swim in very cold water because it increases the risk of drowning.
  - Look out for other children who might be in danger.
  - Do not go near a pool unless supervised.
  - Do not scream for help unless you mean it.
  - Do not roughhouse in the water.