

Drowning Prevention

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How large is the problem of unintentional drowning in the United States?

- In 1997, 4,051 people drowned, including 964 children younger than 15 years old.
- In 1992, the U.S. Coast Guard received reports of 6,000 crashes involving recreational boats that resulted in 3,700 injuries and 816 deaths.

Where does childhood drowning occurs most often?

Most children drown in swimming pools. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), emergency departments reported that among children younger than 5 years old, about 320 fatal drowning in 1991 and nearly 2,300 non-fatal near drowning in 1993 occurred in residential swimming pools. Between 60-90% of drowning among children aged 0-4 years occur in residential pools; more than half of these occur at the child's own home. Compared with in-ground pools without four-sided fencing, 60% fewer drowning occur in in-ground pools with four-sided isolation fencing.

How often is alcohol use involved in drowning?

Alcohol use is involved in about 25-50% of adolescent and adult deaths associated with water recreation. It is a major contributing factor in up to 50% of drowning among adolescent boys.

How can people guard against drowning?

You can greatly reduce the chances of you or your children becoming drowning or near-drowning victims by following a few simple safety tips:

- Whenever young children are swimming, playing, or bathing in water, make sure an adult is **constantly** watching them. By definition this means that the supervising adult should not read, play cards, talk on the phone, mow the lawn, or do any other distracting activity while watching children.
- Never swim alone or in unsupervised places. Teach children to always swim with a buddy.
- Keep small children away from buckets containing liquid: 5-gallon industrial containers are a particular danger. Be sure to empty buckets when household chores are done.
- Never drink alcohol during or just before swimming, boating, or water skiing. Never drink alcohol while supervising children. Teach teenagers about the danger of drinking alcohol and swimming, boating, or water skiing.
- To prevent choking, never chew gum or eat while swimming, diving, or playing in water.
- Learn to swim. Enroll yourself and/or your children aged 4 and older in swimming classes. Swimming classes are not recommended for children under age 4.

- Learn CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). This is particularly important for pool owners and individuals who regularly participate in water recreation.
- **Do NOT use** air-filled swimming aids (such as "water wings") in place of life jackets or life preservers with children. These can give parents and children a false sense of security and increase the risk of drowning.
- Check the water depth before entering. The American Red Cross recommends 9 feet as a minimum depth for diving or jumping.

If you have a swimming pool at your home:

- Install a four-sided, isolation pool-fence with self-closing and self-latching gates around the pool. The fence should be at least 4 feet tall and completely separate the pool from the house and play area of the yard.
- Prevent children from having direct access to a swimming pool.
- Install a telephone near the pool. Know how to contact local emergency medical services. Post the emergency number, 911, in an easy-to-see place.
- Learn CPR.

Additional Tips for Open Water:

- Know the local weather conditions and forecast before swimming or boating. Thunderstorms and strong winds can be extremely dangerous to swimmers and boaters.
- Restrict activities to designated swimming areas, which are usually marked by buoys.
- Be cautious, even with lifeguards present.
- Use U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (life jackets) when boating, regardless of distance to be traveled, size of boat, or swimming ability of boaters.
- Remember that open water usually has limited visibility, and conditions can sometimes change from hour to hour. Currents are often unpredictable -- they can move rapidly and quickly change direction. A strong water current can carry even expert swimmers far from shore.
- Watch for dangerous waves and signs of rip currents -- water that is discolored, unusually choppy, foamy, or filled with debris.
- If you are caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore. Once you are out of the current, swim toward the shore.

For additional information, contact your local Outreach and Extension Center or the MU Extension Rural Safety and Health Program, 1.800.995.8503.

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