



Swimming Safety

March 2016

Dr. Bethany Rife

Board Certified
Pediatric Physician



Drowning is one of the leading causes of death in otherwise healthy children. There are many things we can do to keep our children safe from drowning. Below are some helpful tips.

Swimming lessons:

Babies can be taught to float on their backs when automatically when they fall in the water as early as age 6 months. All children should be taught how to float on their back as a life-saving skill. Once they have mastered this, then they can learn to get to the side of the pool to climb out, and then work on actual swimming skills. There are many programs out there to help you teach your kid to learn to swim. Infant Swim resource is a program that teaches 6 months old and up to float for safety purposes. The website for more information is infantswim.com. The YMCA offers lessons starting at age 3. Fins is another local place for swim lessons starting at age 6 months. They offer a gentle approach to getting the infant comfortable in the water with the parent by their side and teach skills as the child is ready. They have different levels and will gradually teach floating and swimming skills with good technique. Also, if as the parent, you do not swim, we strongly encourage you to learn some basic skills so that you would be able to rescue if your child was to ever fall in.

Floaties and life jackets:

Make sure the flotation device you are allowing your child to use is recommended for their age and weight. No flotation device is considered a life saving device. Many life jackets float children **face down!** See how your child floats in the device. Also, never depend on this to keep your child safe, **always** be nearby and watching your child.

“Dry” drowning or near drowning:

In recent years there has been information circulating the internet about the dangers of “dry” drowning. What this is actually referring to is a child having a near drowning experience that involves them inhaling some water. The water in the lungs can cause a subsequent reaction but does not always. For the child to have inhaled water the parent or someone watching would know. They would cough and have trouble catching their breath, but would then appear fine. So if your child has this type of event this warrants being more aware of their behavior later in the day. Signs to look for include excessive sleepiness, persistent cough hours after the event, poor appetite, and not acting themselves, or obvious

difficulty breathing. These are signs that the child may have swelling in their lungs from the water and needs urgent evaluation. This is a rare but dangerous illness.

Around the pool:

Drownings are more common in the following situations

- At busy pools/partys where the adults are distracted by each other (or their phones) and think the other adults are watching the kids. Always make it very clear who is watching the children and they are not distracted.
- At a home where there are not often children and the pool is not locked off, sometimes the parent is not even aware there is a pool and the child wanders off. Always know where children are in an unfamiliar environment. Ask if there is a pool. Be cautious at grandparents or relatives houses that may not have locked doors or safeguards in place for children.
- Toddlers can drown in open toilets, small kids pools, buckets of water and ditches. Keep bathroom doors closed, empty kids pools when not using.
- If you have a pool take appropriate steps to keep it locked – a fence with a latch that children cannot reach, locks at the top of the back door, pool covers made to prevent children from drowning are some examples.
- Talk to your child about never going into a pool without an adult present.
- Use life jackets always when boating/fishing