

Top 10 Water Safety Tips

According to the National Safe Kids Campaign, drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death to children ages 1-5. Children are naturally drawn to pools, hot tubs, ditches, ponds and lakes. Despite a parent's best efforts, it only takes one head turn before an accident has occurred. This is a statistic we can all help to change.

- 1. Adult supervision.** And I don't mean sitting by the pool absorbed in your phone. Drownings are silent! You won't hear a scream or see a splash. A child can lose consciousness after being submerged for less than two minutes. After 4-6 minutes, permanent brain damage can occur. While having a lifeguard and other swimmers and parents present may make you feel safer, the reality is that lifeguards can be distracted, and the other parents are watching their own children, not yours.
- 2 Swimming Lessons.** Evaluating different programs can be challenging – here are a few pointers. Check out the facility, observe lessons, and interview other parents whose children have participated in the program you are considering. Notice the progress the students are making during lessons. Is the instructor working with one child or a group of children? Is the child/children responding to the instructor or sitting on the steps? Are the students learning how to handle real life situations? For example, can they get back to the steps should they fall off? Can they float independently, or only with assistance? Do they know how to roll over and maintain the essential survival back float? Don't assume that because your baby can't talk, he is incapable of learning to swim, nor that if a toddler is fussing, they won't be successful. Crying means your baby is breathing. It is also a baby's way of communicating to summon help and that's a good thing when you're dealing with preventing drowning. Children as young as six months can be taught to roll over from a face down position in the water and float on their backs. And toddlers who are walking can learn this skill in addition to being able to swim back to the pool edge or steps.
- 3 Physical barriers.** A must for any backyard pool is a fence at least four feet high, with a self-latching, and self-locking gate. Pool fences save lives. Period. But they are not fool-proof. Even self-latching gates don't always close completely. Older siblings and even adults can forget to latch the pool fence. Ponds, creeks and other bodies of water present even more dangers to Colorado kids, as there are no barriers to prevent curious little ones from entering them.
- 4 Hire a lifeguard for parties.** An inexpensive way to keep everyone safe and lesson your own stress. Or designate an adult (who can swim) as the water watcher. Switch every 30 minutes.
- 5 Learn CPR and first aid.** Be prepared in case of an accident.

- 6 Take the toys out of the pool.** Many babies and toddlers fall into pools while reaching for a toy. Remove the temptation when you are done swimming for the day.
- 7 Throw out the water wings.** Water can be a deadly environment for the unskilled child. Flotation devices: water wings, floaties, swim trainers and the like foster a false sense of security. Children accustomed to wearing such devices frequently meet tragedy when they enter the water without them. If you are using a flotation device, make sure it is U.S. Coast Guard approved. However, never depend on flotation devices to take the place of adult supervision. Young children can, and do, take off life jackets.
- 8 Talk to your kids.** Start early. Go over water safety rules every day your kids are around water. Your words will sink in and can prevent accidents.
- 9 Check the furniture in the yard around the pool.** Children have climbed over pool fences and drowned. If a table or chair is light enough for a toddler to pick up or push, don't leave it anywhere close to a pool.
- 10 The most fun piece of advice: Get in the water with your kids!** Once you get over getting your hair wet, you'll discover what a blast you can have with your kids in the water, especially when they are young enough to still want Mom and Dad in the pool.

Judy Heumann, founder of Infant Aquatics, is a learn to swim specialist who has been teaching Boulder County's youngest residents to safely enjoy the water for almost four decades. In 2010 she opened Swim•Float•Swim! in Longmont. Her facility is dedicated solely to teaching infants and young children lifesaving survival skills. For more information visit www.swimfloatswim.com.