



## **Ventura County Fire Department**

**Office of Community Education**

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# *Fire & Life Safety Information*

## *“Water Safety”*

The Ventura County Fire Department offers these important safety tips to families who take the plunge into the swimming pools, hot tubs, lakes, beaches and rivers across the county.

Water safety can help you prevent accidents while swimming. When we think of water safety, we generally think of swimming pools. But there are many other places where water safety should be practiced. A child should never be unsupervised in or near water, even shallow wading pools. The primary element in preventing incidents near the water is constant supervision.

Knowledge is a powerful tool for combating these tragedies. Knowing how and where children drown, as well as the concrete steps you can take to avoid danger, may make a life-and-death difference for your family. Lost potential, due to death or irreparable disabilities can never be measured. This program is designed to promote awareness and prevent accidents near and around water.

### **Why Kids are at Risk**

- Drowning is a large cause of accidental death for American infants and children under the age of **five**. Children at the age of five have no fear of water.
- Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death to children ages 14 and under, taking more than 1,000 children’s lives each year.
- Most drownings take place in the child’s home pool, and one-third occurs at the homes of friends, neighbors or relatives.
- The majority of children who drown in swimming pools were last seen in the home, had been out of sight for less than five minutes, and were in the care of one or both parents at the time of the drowning. Drowning is a quick and silent killer. In the time it takes to cross the room for a towel (10 seconds), a child in the bathtub can become submerged. In the time it takes to answer the phone (2 minutes), that child can lose consciousness. In the time it takes to sign for a package at your front door (4 to 6 minutes), a child submerged in the bathtub or pool can sustain permanent brain damage.
- In-ground swimming pools without complete four-sided isolation fencing are 60 percent more likely to be involved in drownings than those with four-sided isolation fencing.
- Drownings and near-drownings tend to occur on the weekend (40 percent) and between the months of May and August (66 percent).
- Diving into unfamiliar water is a major reason for aquatic-associated spinal injuries. The easiest tip to remember regarding water safety is never dive into any unknown water.
- Older children are more likely to be at risk in open water sites, such as lakes, rivers and oceans.
- It’s important to know that children – especially younger ones – can also drown in as little as 1 inch of water. This puts them at risk of drowning in wading pools, bathtubs, toilets, fountains, water buckets, diaper pails, spas and hot tubs. Devices (such as bathtub seats or water wings) cannot be relied upon to keep them afloat and alive.

## **Plan Ahead to Prevent Injuries**

- Children should learn to swim by qualified instructors when they are ready, usually after age 4. If you don't know how to swim, enroll with your kids!
- Adults and kids over age 13 should learn infant and child CPR, including the babysitter.
- Know which neighbors and friends of your child have pools. Make sure an adult will be supervising your child while visiting.
- Keep rescue equipment, CPR instructions, emergency numbers and a telephone by the pool so that you can call 9-1-1 in an emergency. Pool alarms and pool covers can offer an extra layer of protection. If you use a pool cover, carefully read and follow the manufacturer's directions for safe installation, use and maintenance. Always completely remove the cover before using your pool or spa, to avoid the possibility of anyone especially a small child being trapped and drowning under the cover. These covers are not for safety, and no one should ever crawl or walk on them. Pool covers are not designed to prevent children from drowning. Keep water from collecting on the pool cover surface, watch children even around a pool that's covered. Pool covers should be used in conjunction with fencing and constant supervision.
- Install four-sided isolation fencing at least 5 feet high, equipped with self-closing and self-latching gates, around home swimming pools, which will protect against unauthorized entry and use. (The inside latch should be above the reach of toddlers or young children).
- Check with your state or local government to learn their specific legal requirement concerning fencing around pools and spas. You cannot be too cautious. If your pool, spa or hot tub is indoors, lock the door to the room or have a cover that locks, to keep out children and other unauthorized users.
- Assure a clear view of the pool by removing vegetation and other obstacles out of view. Never leave furniture near the fence that would enable a child to climb over the fence.
- Keep toys away from the pool. Toys can attract young children into the pool.
- Pool goers should take precautions against E. Coli. Swimming pools can be a breeding ground for dangerous microorganisms. Be certain that the pool is sanitized with chlorine to kill harmful bacteria. Chlorine helps maintain a clean and safe pool. Adhere to state standards and be sure to carefully follow and Monitor all directions on pool treatment products. Toddlers should wear proper swim diapers designed to contain urine and feces.
- It is recommended that maximum water temperature never exceed 104°F (40°C) in hot tubs. High water temperatures can elevate your body temperature beyond safe limits. Keep an accurate thermometer in the spa or hot tub at all times to monitor the water temperature. Be sure you check the water temperature before and while in the hot tub.
- Empty all buckets, containers and wading pools immediately after use. Store them upside-down and out of children's reach.
- Keep toilet lids shut and use toilet locks if needed.

## **General Swimming Rules**

- No swimming without permission of parent, instructor and/or lifeguard on duty.
- No running on the pool deck.
- No diving into the shallow pool.
- No glass containers in the pool area.
- Swimmers should wear normal swim attire.
- No pushing or shoving others into the pool or while on deck.
- No horseplay in the pool or on the deck.
- No alcohol consumption in and around the pool area.
- One person on the diving board at a time.
- When going off the diving board, go straight off the end of the board, swim out and around the board to get out of the way.

## Teach Safety

- Swimming lessons are an important step, but they do not make a child “drown-proof.” Children need to learn other water safety lessons, as well.
- Have everyone in the family take swimming lessons - it can help save a life.
- Always swim with a buddy. Swimming alone is very dangerous.
- Swim near a lifeguard. Designate a "watcher." Do not allow anyone to swim without a "watcher". Examples of good safety behavior by adults are important for young children.
- Know where to locate and how to use rescue equipment and emergency phone numbers.
- Always keep basic lifesaving equipment by the pool and know how to use it. Pole, rope, and personal flotation devices (PFDs) are recommended. The more accessible these objects are, the easier it will be for swimmers to rely on one if they begin to struggle. Remember, air-filled rafts and tubes are not considered actual safety devices or PFDs.
- Always wear U.S. Coast Guard approved safety equipment around oceans, rivers, lakes or when participating in water sports. Don't rely on substitutes such as flotation devices, inflatable toys, bathtub seats, or water wings that cannot replace parental supervision. Such devices could suddenly shift position, lose air, or slip out from underneath, leaving a child in a dangerous situation.
- Post CPR instructions and the 9-1-1 Emergency numbers in the pool area.
- Never leave a child unobserved around water. Your eyes must be on the child at all times. Adult supervision is recommended even when a lifeguard is present.
- Don't run or engage in horseplay on pool decks. Decks are very slippery when wet.
- Do not let children dive into water their first time in. The water depth can be deceiving.
- Keep toys and pets away from the pool; they can cause a child to fall into the water.
- Always swim away from diving boards and slides; when jumping, diving or sliding, be sure to wait until others clear your landing area before entering the water.
- Don't mix drugs or alcohol with swimming. Prohibited alcohol consumption is crucial. Alcohol is a "major factor" in drowning. It reduces body temperature and impairs swimming ability. It also impairs judgment; inducing people to take risks they wouldn't otherwise take.
- Make sure pool-cleaning equipment, such as brush and skimmer pools, don't come in contact with power lines.
- If a child is missing, check the pool first. Go to the edge of the pool and scan the entire pool, bottom, and surface, as well as the surrounding pool area.
- Pay attention to open water. Be aware of undercurrents and changing waves and undertows when at the ocean or lake.
- Persons with heart disease, diabetes, high or low blood pressure or any serious illness, and pregnant women -- indeed persons with any doubt -- should not enter a spa or hot tub without prior consultation with their doctor.
- People with skin, ear, genital or other body infections, open sores or wounds should not use the spa or hot tub because of the possibility of spreading infection.
- Shower with soap and water before and after using the spa or hot tub. Showering before washes away many of the common skin bacteria, and removes lotions, deodorants, creams, etc. Perspiration and lotions will reduce the effectiveness of the disinfectant and lessen the ability of the filter to work efficiently.
- Enter a hot tub slowly, rapid temperature changes can cause you to faint or lose muscle control. Soaking in a hot tub too long makes some people nauseous, dizzy, lightheaded or faint. Don't soak for more than 15 minutes at one sitting in 104°F water. If you wish to soak for a longer period of time in high temperatures, leave the spa or hot tub after 15 minutes, shower, cool down and then return for another brief stay. In lower temperatures like 98.6°F (normal body temperature), most people can comfortably and safely soak for longer periods at one sitting.
- Do not try to adjust or touch equipment such as pumps, heaters or electrical appliances while you in water.

### **What to Do If You See Someone Drowning?**

- Call 9-1-1 immediately. We advise installing a telephone or using a cordless phone in any pool area.
- If the victim is within throwing distance, throw a floatable object to them. This includes a life jacket, kick board or even an empty gallon jug.
- If the victim is within reaching distance, assist them by extending something long, such as a rope, pole, ring boughie or a tree branch.
- If you must enter the water to assist someone, take a flotation device large enough to carry two adults safely. Keep the device between you and the person in distress; even a child can put an adult at risk in deep water.
- **When Should My Child Start Swimming Lessons?**
- Wait until your child is four years old to start swimming lessons.
- Children under age four are more likely to develop infections from swallowing too much water.
- Parents can get started earlier with classes in which kids keep their heads above water.
- Make sure that the instructor is certified by Red Cross or YMCA standards.

### **Sun Protection**

- Wear a shirt, preferably made of tightly woven fabrics that block the sun's permeation.
- 20 minutes before going outside apply sunscreen with a skin protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.
- Do not apply sunscreen to children under 6 months of age. Instead, limit the time they spend in the sun.
- Put on a hat broad enough to shade the sensitive skin on your face, ears and neck.