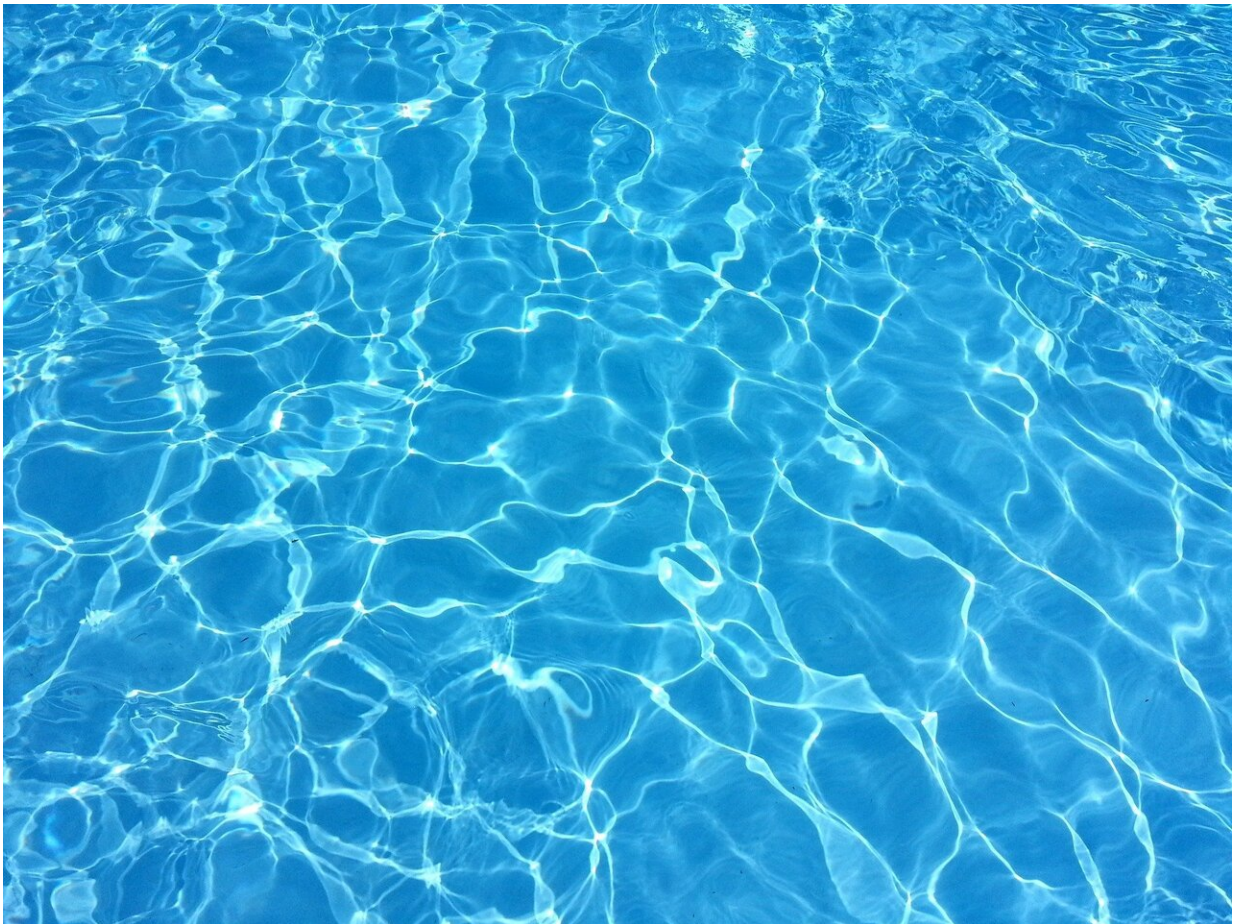


Ask the Pediatrician: What are the best ways to make a backyard pool safer?

July 2 2021, by Dr. Sarah Denny, Apa



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Q: We want to install a swimming pool in our backyard. How can we

make it as safe as possible for our young children and their friends?

A: Swimming [pools](#) can have a powerful allure to little [children](#), even when it's not swimming time. It's great that you are keeping safety top of mind because kids can slip away from even watchful adults in mere seconds.

Water safety is important for all ages, of course, but especially for toddlers. Drowning is the leading cause of injury death in children 1-4. Young children can drown in as little as an inch or two of water, and it can happen quickly and silently.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission studied drownings among children ages 4 and under in Arizona, California and Florida, where pools are especially common. It found that nearly 70% of those children were not expected to be at or in the pool. The study found that 46% of the children were last seen in the house.

Between 2013 and 2015, most (58%) drownings among children ages 4 and under took place in a pool or spa at their own home. Most children drowned when they wandered out of the house and fell into a swimming pool that was not fenced off from the house. They slipped out a door, climbed out a window, and even crawled through a doggy door to access the pool.

But a family [swimming pool](#) isn't the only one a child can get into unnoticed. More than a quarter (27%) of drownings among children ages 4 and under were at the home of a friend, relative or neighbor.

Only some states and municipalities have laws requiring pool safety fences; there is no national pool fence law. A sturdy fence that surrounds your pool is vital. Install a self-closing and self-latching gate, with the latch at least 54 inches from the ground.

Whenever your child will be at someone else's home, always check for ways your child could access pools or hot tubs.

In addition to a fence, other measures can be used as supplemental layers of protection:

- Safety gates, door locks and doorknob covers: These can help prevent very young children from going outside unnoticed. Make sure siblings and all other [family members](#) know to always close the door behind them so younger children can't follow them out.
- Pool alarms: Children can drown within seconds, with barely a splash. Swimming pool alarms can detect waves on the water's surface and go off when someone has fallen into the pool. Make sure alarms have fresh batteries, and keep in mind that none are substitutes for a properly installed pool fence.
- Alarms on the pool fence gate and house doors: Door and gate alarms can be equipped with touchpads to let adults pass through without setting them off. House doors always should be locked if a child could get to the pool through them.
- Water watcher: Find a person in the group whose job is to watch the children swimming or playing in or near any bodies of water. This person should not be drinking alcohol, should put away his or her cellphone, should avoid other activities such as socializing, food preparation or cleaning up, and should supervise even if a lifeguard is present. Be sure the water watcher gets a break at some point and can hand over duties to another adult.
- Touch supervision: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends staying within arm's length of toddlers, providing constant touch supervision. Get in the water with your toddler and don't rely completely on lifeguards, who often have dozens of children to monitor.
- Life jackets: Put your child in a properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket when around or near water. Keep equipment

- approved by the Coast Guard, such as life preservers, at poolside.
- Swim lessons: The AAP recommends swim lessons as a layer of protection against drowning that can begin for many children starting at age 1. Check with your pediatrician if you have questions about your child's readiness for swim lessons.

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