

How to protect your kids from drowning

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(HealthDay)—Drowning can be swift and silent, making it a leading cause of accidental death among children.

To help parents protect their kids in and around the water, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has updated its water safety recommendations.

Drowning is the third-leading cause of accidental injury-related death among 5- to 19-year-olds. Nearly 1,000 [children](#) in the United States died from drowning in 2017, and 8,700 were seen at hospital emergency departments after a drowning event, according to the AAP.

Toddlers and teens are at highest risk.

"Drowning is the single leading cause of injury-related death among children ages 1 to 4," said Dr. Sarah Denny, lead author of the updated [policy statement](#).

"Many of these deaths occur when children are not expected to be swimming or when they have unanticipated access to water. Toddlers are

naturally curious; that's why we must implement other strategies, such as pool fencing and door locks," she added in an AAP news release.

But little kids aren't the only ones at high risk. Nearly 370 [young people](#) between 10 and 19 years of age drown each year in the United States.

"Adolescents can be overconfident in their swimming abilities and are more likely to combine [alcohol use](#) with swimming—compounding their risk significantly. Children of color, especially African American teens, are especially at risk," Denny said.

The policy statement outlines ways to protect children of all ages from drowning, and having children learn to swim is one of the recommendations.

According to statement co-author Dr. Linda Quan, "Research has found that swim lessons are beneficial for children starting around age 1, and may lower drowning rates."

Quan suggested that "families can talk with their pediatrician about whether their child is developmentally ready for swim lessons, and then look for a program that has experienced, well-trained instructors. Ideally, programs should teach 'water competency,' too—the ability to get out of the water if your child ends up in the water unexpectedly."

But learning to swim cannot "drown-proof" a child, so parents also need to take other preventive steps. In homes with a pool, the most important safety step is a fence that completely surrounds the pool and isolates it from the house, the AAP advises.

When supervising kids who are swimming, adults must always pay attention and avoid any distractions. When infants or toddlers are in or around the water, an adult with swimming skills should be within an arm's length, providing constant "touch supervision."

And never leave young children alone in a bathroom, the experts say. The use of toilet locks can prevent [drowning](#) of toddlers. Never leave children alone or in the care of another child while in or near bathtubs, pools, spas or other open water.

In addition, always empty water from buckets and other containers immediately after use.

The policy statement was published online March 15 in the journal *Pediatrics*.

New information for parents will also be posted on the AAP's HealthyChildren.org website. It is to include [water](#) safety advice based on children's developmental stages, and how to choose a good learn-to-swim program.

More information: The American Red Cross has more on [water safety](#).

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