

## **What are the hazards for our child of being around water?**

Water is hazardous for young children. In fact, as much fun as water can be, it's dangerous no matter where you find it — in a bucket, bowl, toilet, tub, sink, puddle, pool, or elsewhere. Parents can avoid tragedy by taking this old adage to heart: A baby or toddler can drown in less than an inch of water.

The best way to protect your child from accidental drowning is to remove even the smallest source of water from his play area, and if water is present, don't take your eyes off him for a minute. If you're at a pool or beach, it's fine to let him splash and play to his heart's content — as long as you're watching.

### **What about water safety in the bathtub?**

There are several things to remember when bathing your child, but the most important is to never leave him unattended in a bathtub, even for a minute. If the phone rings and you must answer it, wrap him in a towel and take him with you.

- Cover the tub surface with a rubber suction mat to prevent slipping and only fill the tub with 3 to 4 inches of warm water. Support his back at all times if he can't sit up securely on his own.
- Don't allow your child to drink the bath water or submerge his eyes and head. The soap and shampoos could irritate his eyes and intestinal tract.
- Keep the toilet lid and bathroom door closed when not in use, or get a lid lock for the toilet.

### **When is it safe to bring my child to a pool or lake?**

You may want to wait to go to a pool or lake with your child until he can hold his head up on his own (usually by 4 or 5 months). If your child is old enough to go into the water with you, follow these six water safety steps:

- Pool drains were named one of the top five hidden home hazards by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) in 2007. The suction from a pool drain can be strong enough to hold even an adult underwater, pulling on the hair or on the body and forming a seal. Missing covers often cause the problem.
- Make sure the water is warm enough, preferably between 84 and 87 degrees.
- Pool water should be properly chlorinated, and natural bodies of water should be unpolluted and safe for wading.
- Don't put a baby less than 6 months old under the water. Although infants naturally hold their breath under water, they continue to swallow.
- Take an infant/child CPR course.
- If you have a plastic wading pool, drain it and store it in an upright position after each use. If you have a permanent pool, make sure it's enclosed with a fence that's at least 4 feet high, and lock the gate leading to the pool after each use. After swimming, remove any toys from the water and deck.
- Make sure the pool or lake is equipped with rescue equipment and a readily accessible phone for emergencies, or take a portable phone to the pool in case of emergency — and so you won't be tempted to run into the house to grab a call.

### **When can my child start taking swimming lessons?**

There are many infant swim and water safety classes offered nationwide. That doesn't mean it's a good idea to enroll your child in one. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, swim classes for children shouldn't be started until age 3 because swim classes seem to make both children and their parents overconfident. That doesn't mean you and your baby can't enjoy the water, it's just a bit early to enroll him in lessons.

As soon as you start bringing your child into the water, begin conveying simple water safety rules such as don't go near water without an adult, always swim with a buddy, don't run on the pool deck or boat dock, and jump in feet first. Even children who are not yet talking understand a great deal more than they let on. One day your child will surprise you by repeating an oft-heard safety phrase, and by the time he's old enough to take lessons, he'll be familiar with the basics of water safety.

## **What should I do if my child slips under the surface in a tub, pool, or other body of water?**

When your child is in the water, it's extremely important not to leave him unattended, even for a second. If he slips under water for a moment during bath time or while playing in the pool, it's likely he'll come up coughing and sputtering. If he's been under water for longer, you'll need to move calmly and quickly. Follow these steps:

- Lift your child out of the water.
- Carry him with his head lower than his chest.
- Remove any wet clothing and wrap him in a dry, warm towel or blanket.
- Call 911 or your local rescue squad or bring your child to the nearest emergency room immediately. (Even if he appears fully recovered, he may have inhaled water, which could cause lung damage.)
- If he's unconscious, assess his condition, breathing, and pulse. If he's not breathing, open his airway and begin mouth-to-mouth and nose resuscitation. If he has no pulse or breathing, begin infant/child CPR.

Although chances are you'll never need to do CPR on your child, it's wise to learn the method, just in case.