

DROWNING – A PREVENTABLE ACCIDENT

Once again, our hot Sacramento summer days and spectacular warm evenings are just around the corner. Soon, our hours will be filled with poolside barbecues, trips to the lake, jaunts to the river and numerous other water activities. Yet, this anticipation of summer fun needs to be tempered with a great sense of raised awareness as to the dangers accompanying all water adventures. In moments, a once memorable, happy, day can become a tragedy that forever changes the life of a family. Drowning is not selective, it can happen to anyone and it happens fast. But...drowning is preventable.

Whether in your backyard pool or while visiting a family or friends pool the first rule is to *never leave children in or around the pool unattended*. A responsible adult, who swims, should supervise at all times. This excludes reading, chatting on the phone and drinking alcohol. Keep a phone poolside and know CPR. During larger get-togethers create “pool-watcher” shifts. Assign one person to supervise all children in or around pool. Whoever is *on duty* wears a whistle and only hands it to the person relieving them. Accidents commonly happen in backyard pools, between 5 -7 PM with many people present. Keep pool toys in the shallow end for non-swimmers, who should be wearing life jackets. Air-filled water toys such as mattresses, rings, water wings, and other plastic inflatable are not life preservers! They are toys, made to deflate. Pool toys should never be left in or near unoccupied pools, as they attract a child to water. *Keep toddlers within arms reach at all times* for in California, drowning is the leading cause of accidental death for children ages 1-4, as reported by the California Center for Childhood Injury Prevention and a swimming pool is 14 times more likely than a motor vehicle to be involved in the death of a child age 4 and under...Orange County California Fire Authority.

When in a lake or river all family members should wear Coast Guard-Approved Personal Floatation Device (PFD) (life jackets) when on a boat for skiing, sailing, rafting, fishing or other water activities. Water in lakes and rivers is far colder than most pools and fatigue and cramping may set in, even with the best of swimmers. If children are just playing at the shores edge or in shallow water, a properly fitting life jacket is vital for safety. If someone slips below the surface it becomes far more difficult to find them. In drowning, seconds are critical to survival. Don't dive into lakes and rivers without knowing the depth of the water. Hitting submerged boulders can cause serious head injury, unconsciousness, and potential death. No drugs or alcohol should be used before or during swimming, boating or water activities. Teenagers especially need to learn about the dangers of mixing drugs, alcohol and water sports. According to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention... children under five and adolescents ages 15-24 years have the highest drowning rates.

We assume that with a lifeguard on duty our child is safe. Not necessarily so. According to Drowning Prevention Foundation...19% of the drownings, involving children, occur in public pools with certified lifeguards. Water is fun and children in their excitement can unknowingly become boisterous putting others at risk. With a multitude of children jumping and splashing, confusion may happen. So, when taking children to a public facility parents might consider staying at the pool to supervise, as an added precaution for their child's safety.

Drowning is a *SILENT KILLER*. It happens in an instant. Children often times *silently* slip into the water unnoticed, even when adults are present. Anyone who has turned around and found a child floating face down in a pool generally says, “*I didn't hear a thing, it happened so fast*”. In the event that no adult is close at hand, to immediately pull a child to safety, seconds are crucial. It takes only two minutes for a child to lose consciousness and within four to six minutes irreversible brain damage or death may occur. Even in a “near-drowning” neurological damage can be severe, with staggering, long-term effects for both child and family. According to American Academy of Pediatrics...For every child who drowns, four are hospitalized for near drowning.

ACCIDENTAL DROWNING IS A PREVENTABLE ACCIDENT. Prevention begins with awareness and education. For more drowning prevention tips visit: www.wallypogs.com. If we all keep our eyes open and watch for potential dangers we will have a safer, fun-filled, summer.

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