

Safety measures in swimming



Introduction

Many young children like being around and in water, but proper safety measures should be taken, without which water can be dangerous for young children. One of the leading causes of death among children 1(one) to 4(four) years of age is drowning. According to Australian National Drowning report of 2007, 35 infants and toddlers lost their lives through drowning in the financial year ending 30 June 2007. Most often at home, babies and toddlers drown in swimming pools. Drowning can also happen in other standing water around the home like bathtubs, buckets and pails, especially 5-gallon buckets and diaper pails, ice chests with melted ice, toilets, hot tubs, spas , and whirlpools, irrigation ditches, post holes, and wells, fish ponds and fountains among others.

Drowning to young children is so easy as they can drown in as little as 4 cm(1.5 inches) of water, this therefore means that drowning can happen where and when you would least expect it . While drowning can take only a second, it is almost always silent. For this reason therefore, adults must always watch young children when in or near water.

Keeping Young Children Safe

Young children need constant supervision when near water, whether the water is in a bathtub, a wading pool, an ornamental fish pond, a swimming pool, a spa, the beach or a lake. Several water and pool safety tips have been discussed below:

One may ask the question whether swimming lessons prevent drowning among children. It is a good idea to learn how to swim and children older

than 4 years should learn how to swim. However, according to researchers, there is no research to show that swimming lessons for children young than 4 years old can prevent drowning. This is because children are not old enough at this age to learn how to swim on their own. There are water survival skills that would help one in an emergency which are too hard for young children to react with. However the exact age when young children are ready to learn how to swim, there is not a lot of research about it, but research has shown that children do not have the skills to swim on their own until maybe at the age of 4 years old and above even if their swimming lessons start at a younger age. It should be however noted that one should not assume that a child who knows how to swim is not at risk for drowning. No matter what their swimming skill levels, it is important to supervise young children while they are in the water. (World Health Organization, 2006)

Whenever a child is near water, invest in proper-fitting, coast guard-approved flotation devices (life vests) and use them. Check the recommendations for the weight and size on the label, then to make sure that it fits snugly, have your child try it on. Choose a vest with a strap between the legs and head support for children young than 5 years old- the collar will keep the child's head up and face out of the water. Arm devices such as water wings and inflatable vests are not effective protection against drowning.

Water safety precautions start in the home, for example the bathroom is full of dangers for young children. A young child should never be left unattended in the bathroom especially while bathing even if the child appears to be well

propped in a safety tub or bath ring. All hair dryers and other electrical appliances should be kept away to avoid the risk of electrocution to children.

Hot water can also be dangerous, for the children who are young than 5 years in particular. Unlike older children and adults, young children have thinner skin, meaning that they burn more easily. Just 3 seconds exposure to hot tap water that's 60 degrees Celsius can give a third degree burn to a child. To reduce the risk of scalding you can turn the water heater thermostat in your home down to 49 degree Celsius and by always testing the water with your wrist or elbow before placing your child in the bath.

Child safety is not only to be found at home, your awareness of preventing accidents caused by water can go a long way outside the home. This can be done by finding out if there are water hazards' in your neighbourhood. Find out whether there are pools or water spas, where the retaining ponds or creeks that may attract children are. Make neighbours who have pools aware that you have a young child and ask them to keep their gates locked. (World Health Organization, 2006)

When it comes to safety issues at your own home, having a pool, pond, spa, or hot tub is a tremendous responsibility. Though hot tubs may feel great to adults, it is best not to let children use them at all because they can become dangerously overheated in them and even drown. Having a fence going a round the pool or spa between the water and your house is the best safety investment you can make and this can go a long way towards preventing pool-related drowning. According to consumer product safety commission (CPSC), fences for the pool should meet the following rules: First, fences

should stand at least 4 feet high with no foot or handrails for children to climb on, secondly the slats should be less than 4 inches apart so a child can not get through, or if chain link, should have no opening larger than 50 millimeters. Also gates should be self-closing and self-latching, and the latch should be out of the child's reach. Other devices such as pool covers and alarms can be bought, but the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have not proved their effectiveness against drowning for very young children. The AAP strongly supports fencing as the best measure of protection. (United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2005)

Another way of ensuring safety for young children is to teach them proper pool behaviour, and to make sure that you take the right precautions too. Young children should not run or push around the pool and should never dive in areas that are marked for diving. If there is lightning or if the weather generally turns bad, they should get out of the pool immediately. They should too know that they should contact the lifeguard or an adult if there is an emergency. Most important, supervise your children all the times. You should not assume that just because your child took swimming lessons or is using a floating device such as an inner tube or inflatable raft that there is no drowning risk. Sometimes it is very easy to be distracted for example when you are in a party, therefore designate an adult who will be responsible for watching the children. If in any case you leave your child with a babysitter, make sure he or she knows your rules for the pool. It is also vital understanding that when it comes to water emergencies seconds count, so take a cordless phone with you when you are watching children during water play.

A quick dial feature keyed to your local emergency centre will also save additional seconds. If you receive a call while supervising children, be keen to keep your conversation brief to prevent being distracted. Make sure that you have safety equipment such as floatation devices that are in good shape and are close at hand when boating or swimming. Review your home for water hazards and plan what to do in case of an emergency once you have installed all your safety equipment. Also make sure that you have all post emergency numbers on all phones and ensure that all caregivers are aware of their locations. Be sure to remove all pool toys and put them away after your children have finished playing in the pool. This is because it has been noted that some children drown while trying to retrieve playthings left in the pool. (United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2005)

Water safety should also be considered even after the swim season has passed. This is because some pools have covers and it is not safe in the sense that many children love attempt to walk on top of the covered pools and may get trapped underneath a pool cover. Pools are tempting play areas for young children so keep your pool gates locked and teach your children to stay away from water without your supervision. For the above-ground pools, to lock or to remove the ladder when the pool is not in use is a good idea.

Although the biggest worry, drowning isn't the only concern when young children are exposed to water. Infants in particular are highly susceptible to diseases that can be transmitted in water. When an infant is introduced in to a pool, thereafter dry the child's ears carefully by use of a towel or cotton ball to help prevent swimmers ear (an ear infection caused by water). In order to remove pool chemicals, it's a good idea to wash the baby and

shampoo the hair. Water temperatures below 29 degree Celsius can cause babies to lose heat quickly and body temperatures drop below normal, causing hypothermia.

Therefore any child who starts to shiver should be removed from water immediately, dried and kept in a towel. Inside the pools young children can also cause diseases. Cryptosporidium is a parasite which normally lives in the gastrointestinal tract and is found in faeces and it can therefore be released by babies with leaky diapers. Into pools and accidentally when swallowed by others can cause problems. The safest thing in this case is to keep your baby out of pools until he/she is toilet taught, and if the child must go to a pool use waterproof diapers and change them frequently. (World Health Organization, 2006)

In Case of Emergency

Always check the pool first whenever a child is missing. Remember that survival of the child depends on a quick rescue and restarting breathing as soon as possible. Get the child out immediately if you find it in water while calling loudly for help. If there is anyone else available let them call the emergency number for help. Check and make sure that the air passages of the child are clear. If the child is not breathing, do five cycles of rescue breathing and chest compressions for a bout two minutes or so. If the child is still not breathing, continue giving this first aid as you dial the emergency number to get help if someone hasn't already called and follow any instructions provided by the emergency operators. Lay the child on his or her side if breathing starts-this will help keep the airway open and allow fluids to drain so that the child doesn't choke. Keep the child on his or her back and

brace the neck and shoulders with your hands and forearms, if you think the child may have suffered a neck injury, until emergency help arrives. Do not move or let the child move. Also to keep the child comforted, speak in calm tones and continue to watch for adequate breathing. (United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2005)

Conclusion

It has been noted clearly that water can be a great source of fun for young children. However, if not well supervised, children can find themselves in great danger even to a point of death through drowning, commonly found in the family pools. Flotation devices or swimming skills cannot save a child from drowning. Children in water can also pass risks like diseases to other pool users. It is also important to check the water temperature and the PH level to ensure safety of the children. All the discussed safety tips above should be put into consideration. Above all it should be noted that the only best way to ensure water and pool safety for young children is through adult supervision- the best way to supervise a child is by being within arms reach and engaging and interacting with your children when they are in, on, or around water. Do not let children to take care of their younger siblings.

Reference

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