

Frequently Asked Questions about Drowning

What is drowning?

According to the World Health Organization (2005) “Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid”.

What is near-drowning?

A person can also survive a drowning event with serious long-term health effects from an injury. When a person survives a drowning event but suffers injury, we refer to this as near-drowning. Just as an individual may sustain a permanent brain injury from a car, pedestrian or bike crash, brain damage can and often does occur from near-drowning. Near-drowning can result in long-term impairment including, difficulty learning, remembering, planning and paying attention.

What is active supervision?

Active supervision means staying within sight and reach of your child at all times.

Should I get trained in water safety?

In order to give your child the best possible protection, parents and caregivers should be trained in swimming, water rescue skills, First Aid and CPR. (Canadian Red Cross – Rescue Skills – Electronic fact Sheet, 2006 – www.redcross.ca)

I have an in-ground pool. What kind of fence do I need to keep children safe?

The first and most important thing to remember is the primary function of a 4-sided pool fence. A 4-sided pool fence should be designed to prevent unintended access to the pool area by young children, either by climbing over, crawling under, or going through the pool fence. This consideration will have a significant influence on the type and style of fence you choose to enclose your swimming pool.

For example, it is important to recognize that many fence styles, although aesthetically pleasing, will not adequately prevent unintended access to your pool area. For instance, a “ranch” style fence, which consists of two horizontal pieces of wood connected to vertical posts set in the ground may provide a country feel to your yard but will also provide young children an easy fence to climb and access the pool area.

The following information is only a summary of what parents should know about safe pool fencing. There are good resources with illustrations available online, such as the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/pool.pdf>. You can also consult your local municipal government about laws that apply in your area.

To keep a child from entering your pool area without proper supervision, make sure that:

- The fence and gate are at least 4 feet (1.2 m) high. The fence and gate do not have horizontal rails, decorative cut-outs or other spaces that a child can use to climb.
- Any cut-outs in the fence should be no bigger than 1.5 inches (3.8 cm) – too small for a child to get a foothold for climbing.
- In a lattice fence, the maximum opening in the lattice should not exceed 1.5 inches (3.8 cm).
- If you choose to use a wood or decorative iron fence, the vertical bars should be spaced no more than 4 inches (10 cm) apart. This spacing prevents a small child from squeezing through, and it provides good visibility into the pool area.

- Make sure there is at least 4 feet (1.2 m) of clear space between the fence and any nearby buildings, other structures, or objects that children can climb on. For example, the fence should be at least 4 feet (1.2 m) away from a house, steps, trees, barbecue, chairs, or picnic tables. Pool filtration systems can also aid a child in climbing a pool fence or the hard side of an above-ground pool. Pool filters should be placed at least 4 feet away from the fence or side of an above-ground pool.

To keep a child from **crawling under** the fence or gate:

- Make sure the space between the ground and the bottom of the fence and gate is no more than 2 inches (5 cm).

To keep a child from **getting through** the fence or gate:

- The fence should completely surround the pool and separate it from the house.
- A wall of the house should not form one side of the fence if there are doors or windows (without window guards) that access the pool on this wall. The pool fence needs to be a self-closing, self-latching gate in order to be “childproof”.
- If there is no door that leads directly to the pool area, it may be safe to use your house as one side of the fence. Check that children cannot get through a window into the pool from that side of your house. Windows should not be able to open more than 4 inches (10 cm) – to keep a child from getting through.

Make sure the only way to get into the pool area is through a “childproof” gate.

“Childproof” means:

- The gate is **self-closing** – the hinges have springs or other devices that shut the gate, even when someone forgets to close it. A pool gate should never be propped or tied open.
- The gate is **self-latching** – the latch has magnets or other devices that fasten right away, without needing any action by a person.
- **A young child cannot reach the latch.** For example, if the latch is on the outside of the gate, the latch should be at least 4 feet (1.2 m) above the ground. If the latch is attached to the pool side (inside) of the gate it should be at least 3 inches (8 cm) below the top of the gate to ensure a child will not be able to reach over the top of the gate and easily undo the latch.
- The gate **opens away from the pool area.** In case the gate is not completely closed or latched, a child pushing on the fence will actually close it.

I have an above-ground pool. What kind of fence do I need to keep children safe?

Children are also at risk for drowning in above-ground pools. If your pool has rigid walls at least 4 feet high (1.2 m), you may not need a fence around the pool itself, unless local by-laws state otherwise. The pool walls can act like a fence. Make sure the walls are designed to prevent a child from climbing over or through them – just like a fence for in-ground pools.

If you reach your pool by a ladder or steps, there are several strategies to restrict a child’s access to the pool. One way is to surround the ladder area with a proper pool fence that has a self-closing and self-latching gate (as per our diagrams). You can also surround the top of the ladder and top of the entire above-ground pool with a four foot (1.2m) high fence. Many companies offer this type of product specifically designed for above-ground pools.

If your above-ground pool is connected to a deck attached to your house, it is best to separate the pool from your house with a fence that meets the guidelines for in-ground pools. If this is not possible, you should still try to prevent children from getting through the door without an adult being aware. One way is to install additional fencing on your deck between the house and the

pool and regulate access to the pool with a self-closing and self-latching gate (as per our diagrams in Appendix A).

What about portable hard sided or inflatable pools – do these recommendations also apply?

Whenever a pool is large enough that it will not be drained daily, it should be fenced. Inflatable pools and portable pools **are above-ground pools** and should be treated accordingly. Please follow all manufacturers' instructions when installing and maintaining your portable or inflatable pool, including filtration and water treatment requirements.

Recommendations on portable above-ground pools, whether they are hard sided or inflatable, vary across Canada and around the world. The strongest laws we are aware of are in Australia where the state government of Queensland requires any outdoor pool that can be filled to a depth of 12 inches (32 cm) be fully fenced to protect children. This includes hot tubs and most portable pools – any structure which is designed for people to swim or bathe. New Zealand also has a Fencing of Swimming Pools Act that has been in place since 1987, which requires fencing for outdoor pools which can hold more than 16 inches (40 cm) of water.

In the absence of pool fencing legislation, a best practice to follow is that if the pool is designed in such a way that it is unlikely to be emptied after each day (i.e. if the pool is large enough that it is likely it would be left full for longer than one use – one day – it should be fenced). Parents should remember that even if a pool can be emptied easily they should drain it after each use. Children can still drown in this type of pool if unsupervised.

Families should check with their local municipality to find out if there is a pool fencing by-law and whether it applies to portable, above-ground pools.

What about hot tubs or spas – do these recommendations also apply?

Whenever a water feature is large enough that it will not be drained daily, it should be fenced. Hot tubs and spas should be treated like an above-ground pool. Recommendations on hot tubs and spas whether they are hard sided or inflatable, vary across Canada and around the world. The strongest laws we are aware of are in Australia where the state government of Queensland requires any outdoor pool that can be filled to a depth of 12 inches (32 cm) be fully fenced to protect children. This includes hot tubs and most portable pools – any structure which is designed for people to swim or bathe. New Zealand also has a Fencing of Swimming Pools Act that has been in place since 1987, which requires fencing for outdoor pools which can hold more than 16 inches (40 cm) of water.

In the absence of pool fencing legislation, a best practice to follow is that if the pool is designed in such a way that it is unlikely to be emptied after each day (i.e. if the pool is large enough that it is likely it would be left full for longer than one use – one day – it should be fenced). Parents should remember that even if a pool can be emptied easily they should drain it after each use. Children can still drown in this type of pool if left unsupervised.

Families should check with their local municipality to find out if there is a pool fencing by-law and whether it applies to hot tubs and spas.

Where can I get more information on pool fencing to keep kids safe?

Contact your local government to find out what laws apply in your area

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has published **Safety Barrier Guidelines for Home Pools**. www.cpsc.gov . It has clear illustrations and detail on many aspects of recommended pool fencing. The direct link to this Guideline is <http://www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/Pool.pdf>

The Queensland State Government in Australia revised its home pool fencing law in 2003. This law is now one of the most rigorous in the world. Detailed guidelines, checklists and other information for the public are available at www.poolfencing.qld.gov.au.

Water Safety New Zealand. *Good Advice: Home Pools*. [describes New Zealand's 1987 national pool fencing law] www.watersafety.org.nz

Christchurch City Council – Environmental Services (NZ). *Pool Fencing*. [local council checklist for homeowners on enforcement of NZ's national pool fencing law] www.ccc.govt.nz/es/

What kind of safety equipment do I need for my pool?

Check if your local by-laws specify what type of equipment you should have for your pool. You should always have on hand a First Aid Kit, an emergency phone, a reaching pole and a ring buoy attached with a rope which can pull anyone out of the water. You should practice using this equipment regularly. (Canadian Red Cross – Rescue Skills – Electronic fact Sheet, 2006 – www.redcross.ca)

What is the difference between a lifejacket and a PFD (Personal Floatation Device)?

Lifejackets are designed to turn an unconscious person face-up in the water. A PFD will keep a person afloat, but not necessarily face-up. In a PFD, the floatation material is evenly distributed making it lighter and less bulky.

As long as it is designed for kids, you can use either a lifejacket or a personal floatation device (PFD) for your child. Even if your child is wearing a lifejacket or PFD, supervise her when she is in, on or around the water.

Make sure your child's lifejacket or PFD fits properly. Remember that water wings, inflatable rings, and other swim toys are not safety devices. There are inflatable PFDs on the market, but they are for adults only.

Source:

Canadian Red Cross. PFD & Me.

www.boatsmartcanada.com/cmslib/general/bookoflessonplans-english.pdf

Why Safe Kids Week resources are using only the word 'lifejacket' only to cover all water safety vests for Safe Kids Week?

Some experts insist on using language that distinguishes between lifejackets and PFDs. The Canadian Red Cross has found that in their many years of work in water safety, that the general public understands and recognizes the term "lifejackets" much better than "PFD" or "personal floatation device". To keep our public education resources clear and simple for this campaign, Safe Kids Canada has decided to use the term "lifejacket" to mean both kinds of approved water safety vests.

When should my child wear a lifejacket?

Many drownings of young children happen when they are playing near the water. Children can fall into the water quickly and silently without adults being aware.

A lifejacket can help keep your child safe until someone can rescue her.

Make sure the lifejacket fits your child's weight. Buckle it up every time using all of the required safety straps on the lifejacket. Your child could slip out of a lifejacket that is too big or not buckled up properly.

- If your child is under age 5, put him in a lifejacket when she is playing in on or around water – such as a swimming pool or a lake. You still need to stay right beside your child.
- If your child is older than age 5 and cannot swim well, put her in a lifejacket when she is in the water. You still need to stay close to your child.
- If you are visiting somewhere where you will be near water, bring a lifejacket that fits your child. The place you are visiting may not have a lifejacket that fits your child properly.
- On a boat, make sure you and your child always wear a lifejacket that fits properly.

How do I know which lifejacket is right for my child?

- Make sure the lifejacket is the right size for your child's weight and chest size. Lifejackets for children are based on body weight and chest size. Adult sizes are also based body weight and chest size.
- Make sure the lifejacket is comfortable and light, so your child will wear it. The fit should be snug but comfortable. It should not ride up over your child's ears. Only the devices marked with one of the following are approved for use in Canada:
 - Approved by "Department of Transport Canada" or
 - Approved by "Canadian Coast Guard"
- For young children, your lifejacket should also have these special features:
 - A large collar (for head support)
 - A strap that buckles between the legs – so the lifejacket will not slip over your child's head
 - A waist strap that you can adjust – so you can make the lifejacket fit snugly
 - A strap on the back of the collar that you can grab if your child falls in the water
 - Ties at the neck and/or a sturdy plastic zipper
 - Bright colour and reflective tape to help you see your child in the water
 - At least once a year, check to see if the lifejacket still fits your child

Source:

Canadian Red Cross. PFD & Me

www.boatsmartcanada.com/cmslib/general/bookofflessonplans-english.pdf

Transport Canada, Office of Boating Safety – A few words on lifejackets and personal floatation devices in Canada <http://www.tc.gc.ca/BoatingSafety/news/pfds.htm#14>

Is it safe to take my baby on a boat?

Water safety experts recommend not taking young infants on board because there are no Canadian-approved lifejackets for infants who weigh less than 20 pounds (9 kilograms). Because of their level of physical development, traditional lifejackets would not help to keep a small baby safe. Wait until your child is at least 20 pounds (9 kilograms) and can fit into a Canadian-approved lifejacket, before taking him on a boat.

Source: Office of Boating Safety, Transport Canada. www.tc.gc.ca/BoatingSafety

Recently the Canadian Coast Guard issued this statement:

Salus Marine Wear has designed and now produces a personal floatation device (PFD) for infants from 9 lbs /4 Kg to 25 lbs /11Kg - product name, Bijoux. Through their testing, Salus Marine Wear has proven this to be an effective PFD for infants from 9 lbs / 4 Kg to 25 lbs / 11 Kg. The Salus-Bijoux PFD now provides an option for infants to wear a device that is designed for their body shape and size and in the event that the infant ends up in the water, s/he will remain face up, floating on the surface.

This product however is not approved by Transport Canada, as there is no current standard against which to evaluate it - Salus Marine Wear attests to its effectiveness. Having an infant onboard a vessel wearing a Bijoux PFD and not having another flotation device aboard is not illegal. If an infant must go onboard a small vessel, having the infant wearing a comfortable and effective PFD is the logical and appropriate decision.

Source: www.salusmarine.com/transport_canada.html

Is it the law in Canada that everyone in a boat must wear a lifejacket?

Not yet. Federal law requires boat operators to **carry** an approved and properly fitting lifejacket or PFD for each person on board.

However, we recommend that every person on an open boat should **wear** a properly-fitting lifejacket or PFD. Ninety per cent of recreational boaters who drown in Canada were not wearing a lifejacket or PFD. In many cases, they had one on board but were not wearing it, or it was not buckled up. Canada's cold waters make it hard for even strong adult swimmers to survive until rescue, without a lifejacket.

Many organizations are working to change the law in Canada to require all boat operators and passengers to wear – not just carry – their lifejackets. For more information, contact the Canadian Safe Boating Council at www.csbc.ca.

Where can I get more information about lifejackets?

Safe Kids Canada – Safe Kids Week 2007, Program Update 3: www.safekidscanada.ca

Canadian Red Cross: www.redcross.ca or www.boatsmartcanada.com

Office of Boating Safety, Transport Canada: www.tc.gc.ca/BoatingSafety

Canadian Coast Guard: www.ccg-qcc.gc.ca

Lifesaving Society: www.lifesaving.ca

Canadian Safe Boating Council: www.csbc.ca

Are baby bath seats safe to use?

Safe Kids Canada recommends parents do not use baby bath seats or rings.

Since 2005, Health Canada has issued several advisory on baby bath seats and rings because babies drown when left alone in bath seats even for just a few moments. This happens when the seat falls over, the child climbs out of the seat or slips through the leg openings.

The problem with bath seats and rings is that parents and caregivers have a false sense of security. Parents report they were more comfortable leaving their baby alone in the bathtub for a few moments if the baby was in a bath seat. Some parents believe that a bath seat is a safety device that can prevent their baby from falling over and hitting their head on the tub.

Even though bath seats have recently been redesigned, problems still remain. The arms that attach to the side of the tub can slip or do not attach tight enough to the side of the tub.

Parents and caregivers should also remember that:

Always keep babies within sight and reach in the bath.
Babies can drown in as little as one inch (3.3 cm)
of water in just a few seconds.
Do not pass on bath seats or rings to family or friends.
Never leave a child alone in a bath tub with an older sibling

Where can I get more information about baby bath seats?

Safe Kids Canada www.safekidscanada.ca

Health Canada, Consumer Product Safety http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/child-enfant/equip/bath-bain/index_e.html