



PHOENIX CHILDREN'S *Hospital*

# Pool Safety



Swimming in the pool can be great fun. It's terrific exercise, cools you off on a hot summer day, and gives families special time together.

Unfortunately, child drowning is a top cause of injury-related death for children, and in Arizona, most drownings happen in swimming pools. Children under the age of five are most at risk. To keep children safe, be sure to develop and follow a **family water safety plan**.

### **Every family's plan should include the ABC's of Water Safety:**

**A: Adult supervision** is the first step. Whenever children have access to water, choose a Water Watcher. The **Water Watcher** (who can use a Water Watcher tag, or simply wear a special hat) has eye-to-eye contact with children when they have access to water. The Water Watcher doesn't cook, answer the phone, or do yard-work while on duty. After 15 minutes, another adult can take over, so supervision is always fresh.

**B: Barriers**, like swimming pool fences, are essential to keep children safe. Most drownings occur when children are not expected to be near the pool. Drownings can even occur in neighbor's pools, or in the middle of the night, when parents are asleep.

Putting a fence around a pool is like putting your child in a seatbelt when they travel in the car. Both can save lives. Many attractive styles of fencing are available today, including metal, vinyl, glass, and mesh. Removable fences are available for those who have children visit infrequently, such as grandparents.

**C: Classes**, like CPR and swimming lessons for children at the appropriate age, can help families prepare in case of an emergency.

CPR can make the difference between life and death. Keep your CPR skills sharp by taking CPR classes at least every two years.

When enrolling your child in swimming lessons, be sure to follow the American Academy of Pediatrics' guidelines:

Children are generally not developmentally ready for formal swimming lessons until after their fourth birthday. However, because some children develop skills more quickly than others, not all children will be ready to learn to swim at exactly the same age. For example, children with motor or cognitive disabilities may not be developmentally ready for swimming lessons until a later age. Ultimately, the decision of when to start a child in swimming lessons must be individualized. Parents should be reminded that swimming lessons will not provide "drown proofing" for children of any age.

When you do enroll your child in swimming lessons, make sure that you choose a program that's performed by a qualified instructor, and talk with your pediatrician about your child's readiness for swimming lessons.

## **CHILDPROOFING**

Children's abilities are constantly changing, so it's no surprise that childproofing your home is a constant job. Here are some tips to make sure that your backyard pool area is safe for your children:

### **Fence:**

- Make sure that you have a four-sided fence surrounding your pool. The fence should be at least five feet high, with vertical bars less than four inches apart, and less than two inches between the bottom of the fence and the ground.
- Open your gate and let go. Does it self-close and latch? If not, repair it, and maintain it, so that it does.
- Install a childproof lock on the gate, out of your child's reach. Never allow children to climb on the pool fence.
- Check the fence regularly for rusting, leaning, and warping. Check the soil beneath the fence to be sure children and pets can't dig beneath the fence.

### **Pool area:**

- Trim shrubs and trees regularly, so that children cannot use them to climb the pool fence.
- Keep toys outside the pool fence enclosure when not in use, so children aren't tempted to the pool's edge.

- Move patio furniture inside of the pool enclosure, so children cannot use it to climb the pool fence.
- Store rescue equipment near the pool, such as a shepherd's hook or safety ring. Keep a telephone near the pool whenever you swim, so that you will have it nearby in case of an emergency.
- Lock chemicals in a childproof area, out of children's reach.

### **Hot tubs:**

- Use a child-proof, locking cover which sits snugly on the hot tub. Cover the hot tub at all times when not in use. Do not allow children to play on, near, or around the hot tub, unless an adult is supervising.

### **Home:**

- Make sure that doors leading out to the pool area are also self-closing and latching.
- Secure windows and doggie doors, so that children cannot open them and climb out into the pool area.
- If you have a home alarm system, set the system to "chime" whenever doors leading to the pool area are opened, so you will be alerted if a child goes outside without permission.

## **MAKE WATER SAFETY A FAMILY AFFAIR**

Regardless of your child's age, they are never too young to learn water-safe rules. Teach children to:

- Stay away from the water when an adult is not watching them.
- Yell for help, throw something that floats, and call 9-1-1 if someone falls into a pool. Children should never jump into the water to help a victim.
- Tell an adult if they find a pool gate or hot tub cover unlocked.

Reward your children for water-safe behavior, and talk about the subject regularly with them. Finally, be sure to include babysitters in your water safety plan, and ensure that they have current CPR training.

For more information on pool safety, visit the Phoenix Children's Hospital website at [www.phoenixchildrens.com](http://www.phoenixchildrens.com) or contact Water Watchers at Phoenix Children's Hospital at (602) 546-1712.



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