



PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. Drownings on the Rise – Don't Be a Victim – Practice Water Safety

In a few weeks, schools will close for the season, and many families will begin planning their summer vacations heading to waterparks, pools, spas, or recreational areas that are in or near water. According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), drowning deaths have increased since 2019. Over 4500 people drowned between 2020 – 2022, an increase of 500 additional deaths each year. Drowning deaths differ by age, race, and ethnicity. The most susceptible are children ages 1-4, and older adults over the age of 65. Within these age groups, drowning is the leading cause of death for children and the second leading cause for older adults.

When comparing race and ethnicity, American Indian and Alaska Native had the highest drowning rates compared to other races and ethnic groups followed by Black/African Americans with the second highest drowning rates. These groups have reported never taken a swimming lesson or never learned to swim. According to the CDC, over half (55%) of U.S. adults have never taken a swimming lesson, as a result, 40 million adults do not know how to swim due to the lack of the following in their communities:

- Lack of available pools and access to pools.
- Lack of and affordability of swimming lessons and water safety training.

Drowning can occur in 1-2 inches of water. Small children have drowned in a bucket containing a few centimeters of water. The CDC states, among children, ages 1- 4, more die from drowning than any other cause of death. For children ages 5 – 14, fatal drowning is the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-death following motor vehicle crashes. In adults, drowning occurs due to alcohol use, drug use, epilepsy, minimal swim training or the complete lack of swim training. According to the American National Red Cross, the highest risk locations for drowning vary by age:

- Children younger than 1 year old – more likely to drown at home.
- Children younger than 5, the majority, 87%, of drowning fatalities, occur in [home pools or hot tubs](#).
 - Bathtubs are the second leading location for young children drowning.
 - Buckets, bath seats, wells, cisterns, septic tanks, decorative ponds, and toilets are also potential drowning sources for infants and toddlers.

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- Children 5 to 17 years of age, and older adults, are more likely to drown in [natural water, such as a pond or lake](#).

Drowning: Swift & Silent

Most fatal submersions occur at residential locations. Of those involving younger children, adults are present, but become distracted, resulting in a lapse of adult supervision. People assume, when a person is drowning, they will be able to hear them drowning or know when they are in trouble, but on the contrary, someone struggling to stay afloat and breathe is often unable to wave their arms or call for help; therefore, they drown in silence without attracting attention; drowning is swift and silent.

Suction Entrapment in Pools, Spas/Hot Tubs & Whirlpool Bathtubs

Hot tubs, spas and whirlpool bathtubs are often overlooked as a drowning danger for children. These incidents of unintentional drownings result in falls into the water, hair that becomes tangled in drains or jets, or from body parts becoming trapped.

The Prince William County Fire and Rescue System, urges residents to be vigilant in preventing injuries and drownings by taking the following precautions when you and your loved ones are in or near water:

- **NEVER** leave a child unsupervised near a pool, spa, bathtub, toilet, water-filled bucket, pond, or any standing body of water for even a second!
- **ALWAYS** designate a responsible adult to be the "Water Watcher" of young children while in and around water. The designated adult should not be involved in other distracting activities, i.e., answering the phone, playing games, etc.
- Install a fence/barrier around pools. The Prince William County building code requires a barrier around pools. The barrier must be at least 4' high, and has various requirements based on the type of barrier and the type of pool, spa, or hot tub. For more information please see [Barrier Requirements](#) or contact [Building Development](#) at (703) 792-4040 (TTY: 711).
- **DO NOT** use flotation devices, i.e., air-filled or foam toys, noodles, or inner tubes in place of life jackets/PFDS (personal flotation devices). **Many flotation devices are considered as toys and not designed to keep swimmers safe.**
- **DO NOT** allow children to play in and around the pool or spa area. Remove all toys, balls, and floats from around or in a pool.
- **DO NOT** allow underwater play in a hot tub or spa.
- Install anti-entrapment drain covers and safety release systems to protect against drain entrapment in pools, and spas.
- Know where the pump cutoff switch is located, in the hot tub or spa, so it can be turned off in an emergency.

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- Keep a locked safety cover on the hot tub or spa when not in use.
- Learn to swim; formal swimming lessons, no matter the age, can reduce the risk of drowning.
- Avoid swimming after dark and in muddy waters of lakes, ponds, and rivers.
- Regardless of one's swimming ability, size of the boat or distance to be traveled, require all persons to wear U.S. Coast Guard approved lifejackets/personal flotation devices (PFDs) when boating or involved in water-related recreational activities.
- **DO NOT** dive into above-ground pools, shallow water, or water where you don't know the depth. Diving into shallow water can cause spinal injuries.
- **ALWAYS** swim and/or boat with a buddy and select areas with lifeguards.
- Avoid alcohol consumption or use of other drugs while supervising children during recreational water activities or participating in recreational water activities.
- Check the local weather conditions prior to engaging in recreational water activities.
- Learn CPR! It saves lives.

Drowning can occur anytime and anywhere there is access to water. Individuals can reduce, even eliminate, water-related injuries and deaths by simply changing their behavior. Hence, before heading to the park, beach, or local neighborhood pool, implement safety measures that will protect you and your loved ones when in or near water.

For more information, visit the World Health Organization who.int, U.S Centers for Disease and Prevention Control cdc.gov, [cdc.gov/vital signs/drowning](http://cdc.gov/vital/signs/drowning), Safe Kids Worldwide safekids.org, American Red Cross redcross.org, Consumer Product Safety Commission cpsc.gov, and Statista statista.com.

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