

Safety Tips for Swimmers

Drowning is the second leading cause of deaths in young people - only car accidents kill more people between the ages of one and 24. B.C. has one of the highest rates of drowning in Canada - usually about 90 a year - and many of these happen in private swimming pools, including about half of all drownings of children under 10 years old.

Most of these injuries and fatalities could have been prevented, by following a few simple safety rules.

These rules apply whether you are at the beach for the day, or just hopping into your back yard pool for a quick dip. By learning these rules, and remembering them, you can make sure your swimming is safe and fun; instead of a day you want to forget.

Fence off your pool

Half of all child drownings happen in private swimming pools. If you have a swimming pool, you should make sure there is a fence around it, with a gate that cannot be opened by a child. Make sure the gate is closed and locked when no one is around.

This protects your own children and also other children in your neighbourhood. You may be legally liable if a drowning takes place in your swimming pool and it is not properly fenced off or other safety precautions have not been taken. Ask about local government by-laws, which may relate to swimming pool safety issues.

Read the signs

Signs carry important safety messages. When you're at a pool with signs, read them and obey them. Pool rules are there to protect you, by preventing accidents, and by keeping pools clean and germ-free.

Walk, don't run

Pools by their nature are slippery places. Don't run around the edges of the pool. Be careful getting in and out of the pool - Use handrails where they are provided.

If you have a pool or hot tub at home, make sure it's easy - and safe - to get in and out of. Remember that things can get pretty slippery when the kids have been splashing around.

Look before you leap

Diving into a pool or lake, or just climbing into a hot tub, can be dangerous. One of the most common causes of being paralyzed for life is a broken spine. This often results from diving headfirst into water that is too shallow.

Just because it was okay when you jumped in yesterday, doesn't mean it's still okay today. Things can change - underwater swimmers, toys or objects can show up unexpectedly. Check the area out before you enter, then enter slowly and feet first.

Don't go beyond your abilities

When you go into the water. Only swim where you feel comfortable - never go farther or deeper than you can handle. At beaches swim parallel to the shore, and stay inside of roped-off areas.

Bring a buddy

If you do get into trouble there's nothing like the "buddy system". **NEVER SWIM ALONE.** Make sure the person you're with is watching out for you, and do the same for her or him. Even when there are lifeguards around, it's always better to have a "buddy".

No rough-housing or horse play

Wrestling and tumbling in a pool or lake can be really dangerous. Hitting your head against pool walls or floors, or rocks in lakes, can knock you unconscious - if you don't get help in a hurry, you can drown very quickly.

Don't drink and dive

Alcohol and water don't mix. Injuries involving alcohol are a common problem at private pools, beaches and local swimming holes.

If you are in or around the water, plan on being sober - alcohol not only causes accidents in the first place - it makes them worse, because you can't react as well when you DO get in trouble. Alcohol slows your reflexes and makes you clumsy. It can also put you to sleep - this is especially dangerous in a hot tub.

Keep your pool clean

Dirty pools grow bacteria that can make you sick. A few good habits help keep the pool you use a clean and healthy environment.

- *Always* wash before you get into a pool.
- Never bring food or drinks into a pool. Not only can spills make pools dirty, but also broken glass from cups or dishes is almost impossible to clean up without draining the pool.
- Don't track dirt from outside into the pool.
- Ensure proper bathing suits are used. Do not allow street clothes (i.e., cut-off jeans) or disposable diapers to be worn. If baby has an accident - clean it up right away, and add extra disinfectant to that part of the pool.

Look for hidden hazards

Shallow water, submerged logs or big rocks are all dangerous when you're diving into lakes or swimming holes.

But there are many other, hidden dangers - both at beaches and at pools.

Suction hazards

- Water in swimming pools and hot tubs is always being pumped through a filter system. This means the water is being pulled out of the pool - often through underwater pipes. These suction pipes can suck your hair inside where it can get tangled up and hold your head under water until you drown.
- You should NEVER put your head underwater in a whirlpool or hot tub because the suction lines can catch your hair, and also because of the higher risk of eye or ear infections. If you have long hair, you should wear a bathing cap, or at least braid your hair.
- Sometimes people's arms or legs can get caught in suction lines too. Never play around suction lines, or pool drains.

Other underwater "traps"

Many other pool fittings can trap a person underwater. Some railings or ladders have small spaces, which can trap children underwater. Sometimes, children drown because their arms, legs or head gets stuck in a railing, or between a ladder and the pool wall.

Make sure that all "holes" in your pool or hot tub are either too small or too large for a child to get stuck in.

Broken fittings and sharp edges can cause cuts, bruises and other injuries. If you see any broken play equipment, fittings or pipes, get them fixed.

Parents...

A child can drown in just a few minutes, and in just a few inches of water. Young children need **CONSTANT** supervision by a sober adult when they are in OR NEAR the water.

Even older children should always have someone nearby, and they should use the "buddy system".

Beaches pose special problems because there are so many hidden dangers, such as submerged logs, sudden drop offs, or tidal currents. Stay with your children. Obey any posted warnings about currents or dangerous areas, and ask other people if they know of any trouble spots in the area.

Never let children play in hot tubs - a quick soak is okay, but the hot water can quickly affect a child's small body. See BC HealthFile [#27a Hot Tubs: Health and Safety Tips](#).

Sun smart your child - Buy "waterproof" sunscreen for the pool or beach - remember to reapply after swimming. If your children are playing at the beach, a long sleeved T-shirt and hat protect them from the sun's dangerous rays better than sunscreen.

Take a first aid course - that shows you how to do artificial respiration (sometimes called the "Breath of Life"), child C.P.R. (Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation) and self-rescue and skills for rescuing others. Many agencies offer these courses for parents at reasonable costs and convenient times.

For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

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- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
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