

This Pool Season: One More Drowning is One Too Many

*by Phyllis Agran, MD, MPH**



An unfenced backyard pool: A source of fun but a source of danger too!

It's that time of the year again — pool season! As temperatures rise, there's nothing more fun for kids to do than splash away in the nearest pool.

As pediatricians, parents and grandparents, we must also be aware of the dangers that come with access to swimming pools. In fact, drowning is the No. 1 cause of death among children ages 1-4, here in Orange County, California and across the United States.

Every year, we hear tragic stories about accidental drownings. Here is what Nicole Hughes, Levi's mother, shared with the National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics: "Our three-year-old son, Levi, drowned in June 2018 while we were on a beach vacation with friends. One moment, he was sitting on the couch watching TV while I cleaned up dinner. The next moment, I pulled him from the bottom of the pool. Levi had somehow slipped out of the kitchen, which was filled with people, including myself, my husband, and five other physician friends." Levi's family is working tirelessly to help prevent other families from the pain of a child drowning.

Drowning can happen to any family. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) found that 69% of children younger than 5 years of age were not expected to be at or in the pool at the time of a drowning incident.

The only evidence-based best practice that has been documented through research to prevent the death or disability of a child from unsupervised access to a swimming pool

is installation of a 4-sided isolation fence. The fence should include a self-closing, self-latching gate that meets the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission standard. It's critical that all families remember that unfenced pools — whether they are in our home, or the home of a friend, relative or child care provider — are a danger to children. Pools without isolation fences are like cars without brakes and the newest safety equipment to prevent injury.

Here are the strategies we must use to prevent childhood drowning:

- **Barriers** (including an isolation fence and supplementary barriers such as door alarms for layers of protection)
- **Supervision** (with no distractions such as cell phones)
- **Swim Lessons** (high quality, low-cost lessons which are typically available through your city, the local Y or the Red Cross)
- **Life Jackets** (U.S. Coast Guard-approved for open bodies of water and even at pools for young children and for unskilled swimmers)
- **CPR** (Immediate resuscitation at the submersion site with a focus on the airway and rescue breathing before compressions)

Please take the time to listen to Nicole Hughes, mother of Levi.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQsro78hQC8>

*AAP-Orange County Committee on Injury and Violence Prevention. Chair, Phyllis Agran MD, MPH & Vice Chairs, Vinh Lam MD & Sandra Murray MD.

Resources

AAP Policy Statement: Prevention of Drowning.

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/143/5/e20190850>

American Academy of Pediatrics Drowning Prevention Toolkit.

<https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/campaigns-and-toolkits/drowning-prevention/>

AAP-OC Drowning Prevention Initiative. [https://www.aap-oc.org/initiatives/injury-violence-prevention-](https://www.aap-oc.org/initiatives/injury-violence-prevention-2/#:~:text=Injuries%20Can%20Be%20Prevented,childhood%20injuries%20in%20Orange%20County)

[2/#:~:text=Injuries%20Can%20Be%20Prevented,childhood%20injuries%20in%20Orange%20County](https://www.aap-oc.org/initiatives/injury-violence-prevention-2/#:~:text=Injuries%20Can%20Be%20Prevented,childhood%20injuries%20in%20Orange%20County)