



CLINIC IN THE PARK

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Keeping Your Family Safe Around Water

by Phyllis Agran, MD, MPH, FAAP



During the warm weather months, there's nothing more fun for kids to do than splash away in the nearest pool! However, parents, grandparents and care providers must also be aware of the dangers that come with access to swimming pools.

Drowning is the No. 1 cause of preventable injury death among children ages 1-4, here in Orange County and across California. For each tragic drowning death in this age group, there are 15 nonfatal drowning incidents. Most children recover, but some suffer lifelong medical problems.

Childhood drowning is predictable, and it is preventable. Drowning can happen to any family. It occurs in an instant and it is often silent.

Multiple layers of protection are needed. Here are a few ways we can keep our children safe this pool season:



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U.S. Coast Guard-approved Life Jackets for young children and unskilled swimmers

When heading to the pool, put a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket on young children and all unskilled swimmers.



Floaties are pool toys that can be hazardous — they do not prevent drowning. A U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket should be part of your child's swim attire in and around any body of water. Put it on at home when you leave for the pool and do not remove it until you leave the pool area.

A new law was passed in California. [AB 2146](#) went into effect in January 2026. This new law restricts the production, sale and distribution of personal flotation devices for infants and children that are not U.S. Coast Guard approved.

Get rid of the floaties or aquatic toys NOW and add a life jacket as part of your child's swim attire.

Supervision

Watching a child at the pool — including community pools & spas — is critical! You should always be within arm's reach of young children.

If you are responsible for watching a child, you cannot be distracted by cell phones or conversations with others. If you have more than one child, consider having two adults as “water watchers.”

Install a 4-sided Isolation Fence

Not only does a 4-sided fence around your pool keep kids safe, it can also protect older adults suffering from dementia, and provide a safety barrier for pets and other animals that may wander into your yard.



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In 2024, AB 2866 was passed in California. Daycare facilities (including residential child care homes with a pool) must install a pool fence along with a pool cover or pool alarm. It is preferable to select a childcare facility without a pool, but if the facility has a pool, be sure to check it out.

Swimming Lessons

“Everyone swims” is a good strategy to prevent drowning. In fact, swimming is the only form of recreation that can also be lifesaving. Swim lessons should include water safety instruction.

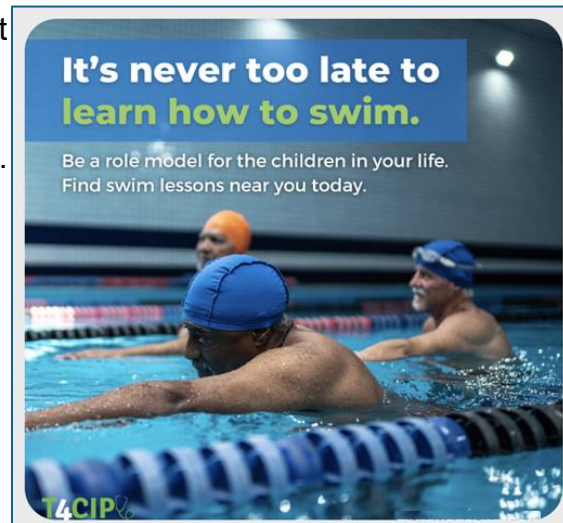
For young children, swim lessons are a layer of protection, but they do *not* replace supervision by adults.

Swim lessons for young children should not be conflated with drowning prevention. A young child may be able to “swim” but can easily panic if the child is in deep water or falls in the pool unexpectedly.

For adults, swim with a buddy. And if you would benefit from lessons, check out what is available in your city Parks & Recreation department and the YMCA. Both offer low-cost, high-quality swim lessons.

Check out the swim programs to make sure the instructors are trained, qualified and certified. Swim instructors should also be certified in the newest CPR guidelines for a drowning victim.

Remember that swim lessons in a pool do not necessarily apply to the conditions encountered in the ocean, lake or river.





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Special Swim Lessons

Many of our parents ask about swim lessons for children with special needs that include neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism. Drowning is a leading cause of injury death among children with autism. Swim lessons are appropriate for your child as a layer of protection. Again, swim lessons and swim skills do not replace adult supervision.

We would like to share this [handout](#) developed for a national program T4CIP (Trainees for Child Injury Prevention) at

Nationwide Childrens to learn about swim lessons for children who would benefit from special lessons, called adaptive swim lessons. Check out adaptive swim lessons in your community.

Speak to your pediatrician and developmental and behavioral pediatrician about water safety for children with special needs. We thank Marc Lerner, MD Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrician at UCI Center for Autism for his discussion presented at a "Lunch and Learn" session hosted by The Raise Foundation and Clinic in the Park Collaborator meeting.

If you have a child who is served by one of the Regional Centers of California and has a need for adaptive swim lessons (or accessing social recreational activities), please contact your child's service coordinator to discuss this further. All service requests will need to be reviewed by the planning team to ensure they meet the regional center's purchase of service guidelines.

If you are a parent, grandparent, or professional staff member supervising children at pools or in the ocean and you are not comfortable with your swim skills, take lessons and ask for help.





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First Aid Training

Enroll the whole family in a CPR/AED class so that everyone in your household knows how to respond and offer assistance in an emergency situation. Cities generally offer these classes. You can also find the workshops through the Red Cross.

Make sure the course includes the 2024 new guidelines for resuscitation of a drowning victim. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Last year, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) created the Pediatric First Aid and Safety Training for Teachers and Caregivers. The course was developed for individuals who are not healthcare providers or professional rescuers but are caregivers with a duty to provide pediatric first aid and emergency responses.

Caregivers include parents, grandparents, guardians, family, friends, babysitters, school personnel (i.e., teachers, bus drivers, coaches), seasonal leaders (i.e., camp counselors, lifeguards, youth group leaders), and anyone else working with infants and children (i.e., foster care workers, social workers). [Click here](#) to learn more.

Following these simple recommendations can keep everyone in your family safe while having fun in the pool!

We thank members of our team who have contributed to our water safety initiative: **Van Nguyen Greco**, MD, FAAP, Child Abuse Pediatrician UCI; **Nakia Best**, RN, PhD, Sue and Bill Gross School of Nursing UCI; **Marc Lerner**, MD, FAAP Behavioral and Developmental Pediatrician UCI; **Sandra Murray**, MD, FAAP, Child Abuse Pediatrician UCI; **Vinh Lam**, MD, FAAP, Trauma Surgeon Rady Children's Health (AKA CHOC); **The Raise Foundation**, and **Charles Denham**, MD Med Tac Global.



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Irvine's Floatie Exchange Program



Last summer, the City of Irvine launched a new program: **The Floatie Exchange Program**, which promotes active supervision in, on, and around the water. The program also encourages parents to include an additional layer of protection using life jackets.

The American Academy of Pediatrics policy, Prevention of Drowning, includes the statement: "Parents should not use air-filled swimming aids such as inflatable arm bands, neck rings or floaties. These 'aids' can deflate and are not designed to keep children safe."

Families in Irvine can bring in flotation devices, watch a short video on how to fit and use a life jacket, and then receive a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket, at *no cost*. (City staff and/or volunteers provide a "fitting" and have the parent/guardian sign a waiver of acknowledgement.)

We applaud the City of Irvine for implementing and continuing the Floatie Exchange Program, which will help save lives.