



Keep Summer Fun by Keeping Children Safe

Drowning is Preventable

By Santi J. Rogers, Director, California Department of Developmental Services, Tony Anderson, Executive Director, the Arc of California, and Eileen Richey, Executive Director, the Association of Regional Centers Agencies, and Nadina Riggsbee, Founder of Drowning Prevention Foundation

With the warm weather upon us, it is important to stay vigilant around children and adults alike while enjoying activities involving bathing and swimming at a pool, river, lake or beach. For children younger than five, drowning is a leading cause of injury, or lifelong disability. And it is the leading cause of accidental death. As toddlers begin walking and exploring, statistics show an alarming rate of pool and other drownings.

Governor Jerry Brown recently issued a message that careful vigilance can prevent tragedy and knowing how to prevent drowning is a critical step in keeping children safe and helping them to live to their full potential. In California, the Department of Developmental Services serves 737 survivors of near-drowning accidents. As a result of their accidents, most of them have severe disabilities. On average, 60 children under five die each year. Fortunately, in 2012, that number went down to 44 – but that is still 44 lives cut short.

To read more about his message on drowning prevention, go to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) website at <http://www.dds.ca.gov/Drowning/Index.cfm>.

Between the preventable nature of near-drowning accidents and the high chance of lifelong disability, these accidents are devastating for families. DDS has partnered with the Arc of California, the Association of Regional Center Agencies and Nadina Riggsbee, founder of the Drowning Prevention Foundation, and many community and state agencies to raise awareness of risks that can lead to childhood drowning accidents.

Now is the time to plan ahead for a safe and fun summer. The necessary steps to preventing drowning are outlined by the [Drowning Prevention Foundation](http://www.drowningpreventionfoundation.org) (www.drowningpreventionfoundation.org) and called “**layers of prevention**,” include the following:

- **Keep constant eyes on young children** playing in or near any body of water, public pool, spa, or bathtub. A child can drown in the time it takes to

answer a text message. Babies and toddlers have drowned in items as seemingly harmless as shallow buckets of water when left briefly unattended.

- **Never leave a child alone near water** while you answer the telephone or doorbell, attend to another child or turn to household chores, even for a few seconds.
- **Designate an adult to watch children at play** at large gatherings. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends staying close enough to reach out and touch the child while being supervised in water.
- **Fence your pool** on all four sides with a barrier that is at least five feet high. Move lawn chairs, tables and other potential climbing aids away from the fence to help keep out children. Any gate or door leading to the pool area should be self-closing and self-latching, opening outward, with the latch placed on the poolside and out of reach.
- **Install panic alarms on all house doors** and windows leading to the pool area, automatic sliding door closers and an automatic safety cover over the pool.
- **Drain off water** that accumulates on top of a pool cover. A child can drown in as little as two inches of water. Completely remove the cover before allowing children in the pool.
- **Check swimming pools for new anti-entrapment grates** on drain suction outlets required by new laws to prevent the physical entrapment of the bathers.
- **Keep reaching and throwing aids**, such as poles and life preservers, on both sides of the pool.
- **All children should wear life vests** (personal flotation devices approved by the U.S. Coast Guard; information available at [Department of Boating and Waterways](#)) when they are near water, especially near rivers and streams, and when boating. Swimming aids such as blow-up “water wings” are not approved.
- **Swimming lessons do not ensure safety.** A child who falls into water unexpectedly may panic and forget his or her swimming skills. Adults who serve as caretakers for children who swim should know how to swim themselves, and also be certified to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in an emergency. Immediate CPR could prevent death or brain damage.

We urge you to remind your families, friends, and neighbors to be aware of drowning risks and to prevent devastating water accidents.

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