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Editorial: Warm weather should remind us to keep kids safe from drowning

By [the Editorial Board](#)

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By the numbers, water safety in California is a success story. In a generation, the death toll from children drowning has been more than halved.

Thanks to state laws passed in the late 1990s, California has long required fences or other barriers around swimming pools at private residences. As a result, only 62 children under the age of 14 drowned statewide in 2012, according to the most recent available figures.

In 1992, by comparison, accidental drowning claimed 138 children's lives.

By any measure, those saved lives represent progress. Yet drowning remains the leading cause of injury-related death among children in this state.

That's right: From poison to guns to cars to playing with matches, no danger out there is as lethal to your child as cool water on a hot day, according to **California Department of Public Health** data. And no group of children is more vulnerable than toddlers: In 2012, 44 of the children who died by drowning were under the age of 5.

This is why, as another hot summer approaches, success must not distract us, whether we're partying poolside or rafting on the American River, as so many did this past weekend. Drowning can occur in mere seconds, and it's silent. Little kids don't shout and flail as they slip underwater.

Nor do those who survive a near-drowning necessarily recover. More than 700 of the disabled Californians being served right now by the state **Department of Developmental Services** are people who suffered brain damage and other crippling injuries as a result of a near drowning. Many will require taxpayer-subsidized care for the rest of their lives.

So, though you've heard it before, hear it again this summer: Watch your kids around water, or assign a watcher. Close your pool gates. Fence your pool if it isn't already fenced.

Drain inflatable pools and coolers after each use; a toddler can drown in an inch of water. If you're swimming at one of Sacramento's many riverfront parks, remember that anyone under 13 is required by law to wear a life jacket, and that fire stations offer free loaners.

If you're at the ocean, stay near a lifeguard. Learn CPR. Keep a phone with you.

And remember that vigilance is nothing to be ashamed of. It works, and it has saved countless lives in a very short time. When it comes to these annual summer tragedies, however, one is the only number that matters if that one is your child.