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facts on

Drowning Prevention

Everyone is at risk of drowning, regardless of how well they can swim. Young children are naturally attracted to water but don't always understand the danger associated with it. They also lack balance and coordination, which makes them more likely to fall in. Older children may overestimate their own skills around water.

In Saskatchewan, drowning is a leading cause of death resulting from a preventable injury among children aged 0-9.

Children can drown quickly and silently in as little as 2.5 cm (1 inch) of water and in under 10 seconds. Most drownings happen at home when supervising adults are distracted or absent.

This fact sheet contains important steps and safety tips to prevent children from drowning.

General Tips

- Stay within arm's reach of children under the age of five and provide active supervision whenever children are in or around water.
- Never leave a young child under the supervision of an older child.
- Enrol your children in a certified swimming program to ensure they are comfortable and skilled in and around water. Swimming lessons do not replace active supervision.
- Enrol yourself in First Aid, CPR, water rescue, boating safety, and swimming skills courses. These skills can help you respond in an emergency.

At Home

- Always keep infants and children under five years of age within arm's reach during bathtime. If you need to leave the room, even for a moment, take your child with you.
- Do not use bath rings or bath seats. Infants can easily tip over or slip under the bath ring and become trapped under water.
- Drain the water out of sinks and bathtubs immediately after use.

- Keep pet water dishes and aquariums out of children's reach.
- Install child-proof locks on toilet lids or on the outside of your bathroom door.

In The Yard

- Empty and turn paddling or wading pools upside-down when there is no direct adult supervision.
- Install a climb-resistant fence that is at least 1.2 m (4 ft.) high around backyard pools, hot tubs, and ponds on all sides. Fence gates should open away from the water with a self-closing and self-latching lock that is out of children's reach. Ensure there is nothing near the fence that can be used to climb over it.
- Ensure that children under the age of five, and older children that are not strong swimmers, wear a lifejacket or personal floatation device (PFD). Inflatable toys such as water wings and blow-up rings are not safety devices.
- Keep careful watch when children are playing with inflatable pool toys. Toys can overturn and force children underwater.
- Remove all pool toys after swim time. Leaving them in the water can attract children.
- Discuss safety habits with your children, including:
  - The pool and hot tub are off limits without direct adult supervision
  - No running and rough play around the pool and hot tub
  - Always go feet first into the water

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In a Watercraft
Watercrafts include commercial boats such as cruise ships and ferries as well as personal watercrafts such as motorboats, canoes, kayaks, and paddleboats.

- Check the fuel level, safety equipment and tools, and condition of the watercraft before every use.
- Show children where the safety equipment is located and how to use them.
- Always wear a properly fitted PFD or lifejacket. This is required by law for every passenger, regardless of age.
- Children less than 9 kg (20 lbs.) should not be taken boating because there are no approved lifejackets/PFDs in Canada for a child of that weight.
- Anyone operating a watercraft in Canada is required to take and pass a water safety course.

Lifejacket / PFD Guidelines by Age Group

Children 0-5
Lifejackets/PFDs must be worn when playing in shallow water, near beaches, on docks, near pools, in boats, or on inner tubes. There are no lifejackets/PFDs approved in Canada for infants who weigh less than 9 kg (20 lbs.).

Children 6-11
Lifejackets/PFDs must be worn around or in deep water, on docks, in boats, or on inner tubes or knee boards.

Teens and Adults
Lifejackets/PFDs must be worn on boats and while using inner tubes, knee boards, water skis, wakeboards, or any personal watercraft.

At the Pool, Lake & Beach

- Be aware of water conditions (e.g., temperature, depth, currents/moving water). Check for posted signs or hazards before swimming.
- Always swim in designated areas and near lifeguard posts. Avoid swimming near boat launches, in rivers and moving waters, and unfamiliar areas.
- Ensure that children under the age of five, and older children that are not strong swimmers, wear a lifejacket or PFD.
- Teach your child water safety habits such as:
  - Never enter the water without direct adult supervision
  - No running or pushing on pool decks or docks
  - Never swim alone
  - Never dive headfirst into water where the depth is unknown; always wade, jump feet first, or lower into the water
- At social gatherings, adults can take turns supervising children. It is best to have one adult for every four kids under eight years of age. As a designated supervisor, ensure you are not distracted by other tasks (e.g., using your phone, barbequing/cooking food).

Choosing and Using the Right Lifejacket or Personal Flotation Device

Choose a lifejacket or a PFD that is approved by Transport Canada, Canadian Coast Guard, or Fisheries and Oceans Canada to ensure it meets safety standards.

A **lifejacket** is designed to turn a person face-up in the water, allowing them to breathe. They are orange, yellow, or red and have a whistle attached.

A **PFD** will keep a person floating, but not necessarily face-up. They are lighter than lifejackets and come in a variety of styles and colours.

Children's lifejackets/PFDs should include a large collar for head support, a strap that buckles between the legs, adjustable waist straps, and reflective tape or bright colours.

Ensure the lifejacket/PFD fits snugly and does not ride up over the child's ears or chin. Do not buy a larger size for your child to 'grow into'. If you can lift the lifejacket/PFD more than 7.6 cm (3 in.) off the child's shoulders, it is too large.

Resources:

Canadian Pediatric Society. Water Safety. March 2023.
https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/safety-and-injury-prevention/water_safety

Parachute. Drowning. November 11, 2024.
https://parachute.ca/en/injury-topic/drowning/

Transport Canada. Choosing lifejackets and personal floatation devices (PFDs). December 27, 2024.
https://tc.canada.ca/en/marine-transportation/marine-safety/boating-safety/choosing-lifejackets-personal-flotation-devices-pfds

Canadian Red Cross. "Diving" into the difference between a lifejacket and PFD – what you may not know about the two. August 19, 2020.
https://www.redcross.ca/blog/2020/8/diving-into-the-difference-between-a-lifejacket-and-pfd-what-you-may-not-know-about-the-two

Transport Canada. Safe Boating Guide: Safety Tips and Requirements for Pleasure Craft. 2019.
https://tc.canada.ca/sites/default/files/2024-03/tp_511e.pdf

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The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute provides services to all those living on Treaty Lands 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, and the homeland of the Métis.

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is dedicated to moving forward on a shared path of reconciliation and partnership. We are all Treaty people.

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