

# Your Health

by Dr. Paul Roumeliotis

## Swimming and Water Safety for the Whole Family

Swimming and other water activities are a great way to relax and enjoy the summer with the whole family. However, every year, children drown in pools. Sadly, what is more tragic is that these drownings can be prevented. In order to keep swimming fun and safe it is important to be very careful when children are swimming or are around water. Here are some tips and facts about water safety:

- Never leave children alone in or near the pool or beach, even for a second.
- Remember that teaching your child to swim does not mean that your child is safe in the water. So even if your child has taken swimming lessons, you should still never leave him/her alone in the pool or at the beach.
- At the pool or beach, make sure that anyone watching your children knows CPR and is able to rescue a child if needed. Also, it is important to keep all rescue equipment by the pool at all times.
- Swimming lessons are not recommended for children less than 3 years of age, as parents may develop a false sense of security because they think their child can swim. Young children also often swallow the pool water which may be dirty, resulting in a higher risk of getting sick.
- When boating or canoeing, remember that all passengers should always be wearing a life jacket, even if they are good swimmers.
- Never let your child water ski, snorkel or scuba dive without instructions and supervision from a qualified instructor or teacher.
- Other than pools and the beach, other water hazards found near or in your home include ditches, potholes, wells, fishponds and fountains, pails, bathtubs and toilets. Parents should be aware that these all pose a drowning threat to young unattended children.
- Never swim around anchored boats in motorboat lanes or where people are water skiing. Also, never swim during electrical storms.
- When buying a life jacket, make sure that it is the right size and worn as per the instructions.
- To avoid spinal injuries, swimmers should not dive in shallow areas of lakes, ponds, beaches, streams or pools where the depth of the water is not known. Also, do not dive into above-ground pools.
- To prevent electrical shock during swimming, keep all electrical appliances away from the pool.
- The pool or hot tub should have a four-sided fence with a self-closing and self-latching gate. The fence should be at least 4 feet high (or to conform with local bylaws) and difficult to climb.
- Do not allow tricycles, bicycles or other toys on wheels around the pool area.
- Do not think of floatie (inflatable) toys as life jackets. Floaties are not approved life jackets and can give children a false sense of security.
- To avoid spread of infection, all pools should be adequately chlorinated. Swimming in pools without adequate chlorinating makes it easier for a bacterial infection to spread.
- After pool use, remove all toys from the pool water so children are not tempted to try to reach them, and secure the pool so they cannot get back into it.

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