

Drowning is Quick and Quiet, So Keep Your Eyes on Your Kids around Water

It's a warm summer day and you're at the beach with your kids. Your cell phone rings and you answer it, shifting your focus from your kids to the conversation. Good idea? Not at all, according to Safe Kids Snohomish County, and it could even be deadly. Children can get into trouble in a matter of seconds when around water, so Safe Kids Snohomish County recommends that parents actively supervise – with their eyes on their kids at all times -- when they are in or near the water.

Drowning is the second highest cause of unintentional death for children ages 1 to 4 and 10 to 14. Approximately 3 out of 4 pool submersion deaths and 3 out of 5 pool submersion injuries occur at a home pool. Overall, approximately 830 children ages 14 and under die each year due to unintentional drownings, and on average, there are an estimated 3,600 injuries to children after near-drowning incidents each year.

"Kids drown quickly and quietly," said Shawneri Guzman, coordinator of Safe Kids Snohomish County. "A drowning child cannot cry or shout for help. The most important precaution for parents is active supervision. Simply being near your child is not necessarily supervising," said Guzman.

Even a near-drowning incident can have lifelong consequences. Kids who survive a near-drowning may have brain damage. After four to six minutes under water, the damage is usually irreversible. Although 90 percent of parents say they supervise their children while swimming, many acknowledge that they engage in other distracting activities at the same time - talking, eating, reading or taking care of another child.

"A supervised child is *in sight at all times* with your *undivided attention* focused on the child," said Guzman. When there are children in or near the water, adults should take turns serving as the designated "Water Watcher," paying undivided attention. Visit www.usa.safekids.org/water to download a free Water Watcher badge.

To help keep kids safe this pool season, Safe Kids Snohomish County recommends these precautions:

- Always actively supervise children in and around water. Don't leave, even for a moment. Stay where you can see, hear and reach kids in water. Avoid talking on the phone, preparing a meal, reading and other distractions.
- Always use a life jacket if you will be in a boat or in the water. Life jacket size/weight must be correct for the person. It must fit snugly. When arms are lifted, the life jacket should not lift up to the chin. All jacket straps, zippers and ties must be fastened.
- If you have a pool or spa, or if your child visits a home that has a pool or spa, it should be surrounded on all four sides by a fence at least five feet high with gates that close and latch automatically. Studies estimate that this type of isolation fencing could prevent 50 percent to 90 percent of child drownings in residential pools.
- A pool or spa should be equipped with an anti-entrapment drain cover and a safety vacuum release system to prevent children from being caught in the suction of the drain. The powerful suction forces can trap a child underwater or cause internal injuries.
- Don't leave toys in or near the pool, where they could attract unsupervised kids. For extra protection, consider a pool alarm and alarms on the doors, windows and gates leading to the pool.

- Enroll your kids in swimming lessons around age 4, but don't assume swimming lessons make your child immune to drowning. There is no substitute for active supervision.
- Don't rely on inflatable swimming toys such as "water wings" and noodles. If your child can't swim, stay within an arm's reach.
- Learn infant and child CPR. In less than two hours, you can learn effective interventions that can give a fighting chance to a child whose breathing and heartbeat have stopped. Contact your local fire department for more information about infant and child CPR classes available locally.
- Keep rescue equipment, a phone and emergency numbers by the pool.

These guidelines apply to inflatable and portable pools, not just in-ground pools. A child can drown in just an inch of water. Kiddie pools should be emptied and stored out of reach when not in use.

Safe Kids Snohomish County has a life jacket loaner program.

Life Jacket Loaner Program:

The life jacket loaner program currently consists of six life jacket loaner cabinets at various locations in Snohomish County. The cabinets are open and available for both kids and adults from Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day. Life jackets are checked out and must be returned by the end of each day. There are directions on each cabinet explaining how to size and fit your child into a life jacket. Waivers and checkout forms are available on the cabinets. Both forms must be signed and placed in the check out box to use a life jacket.

Life Jacket Loaner Cabinet Locations:

The following parks have a life jacket loaner station. The life jackets may be checked out at no charge. They must be returned by the end of the day.

Kayak Point Park – Stanwood
15610 Marine Drive
Stanwood, 98292

Wyatt Park - Lake Stevens
10508 Chapel Hill Road
Lake Stevens, 98258

Martha Lake Park – Lynnwood
16300 E. Shore Drive
Lynnwood, 98037

Check life jackets out at the following fire departments:
Marysville Fire District's Lake Goodwin Station,
Monroe Fire District 3, Gold Bar & Index.

Ross Lake
Snohomish

Silver Lake Park – Everett – *Open after the end of the school year*
11405 Silver Lake Road
Everett, 98208

Twin Lakes Park - Marysville
16324 Twin Lakes
Arlington, 98223

