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Drowning Prevention: Statistics & Tips

How common is drowning?

In Putnam County, drowning has been the second leading cause of unintentional injury fatalities for children (birth through 18) since 2009, according to CAC statistics. Around the U.S., there were 3,582 unintentional drowning deaths reported in 2005—an average of 10 deaths a day—according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Who is most at risk for drowning? (CDC statistics)

Males—Males were four times more likely than females to die from drowning in 2005, according to CDC statistics. Research also shows males are more likely to overestimate their own swimming ability than females, which may be a factor in the increased fatalities.

Children—One out of 4 drowning victims is a child, 14-years-old and younger. For every child who dies, another four receive emergency care for nonfatal submersion injuries.

Nonfatal drowning can cause brain damage that may result in long-term disabilities (memory problems, learning disabilities, permanent loss of basic functioning, etc.)

Minorities—Between 2000 and 2005, the fatal unintentional drowning rate for African Americans ages 5 to 14 was 3.2 times that of whites in the same age range. Reasons for this disparity, although not entirely clear, may be related to factors such as access to swimming pools, social and cultural issues such as the value placed on swimming skills, and choice of recreational water-related activities.

What are the major risk factors?

Lack of barriers and supervision—Children less than one year of age most often drown in bathtubs, buckets or toilets. Between 1 and 4 years, residential swimming pools represent the greatest risk.

Natural water settings risks—Most swimming fatalities for children over 15 years of age occur in lakes, rivers or ocean. These locations pose extra hazards for those unfamiliar with the setting's particular natural dangers (uneven or rocky bottoms, currents, rip tides, etc.).

Limited use of life jackets in boating—In 2006, 710 people died in boating accidents and 9 out of 10 were not wearing life jackets.

Alcohol use—Alcohol use is involved in up to half of adolescent and adult deaths associated with water recreation. It is also implicated in approximately one in five boating fatalities.

Seizure disorders/physical considerations—Drownings are the most common cause of unintentional injury death for people with seizure disorders. Other physical considerations and limitations may also play a role.

Self-reported swimming ability—Could overconfidence play a role? CDC researchers found men of all ages, races and educational levels consistently reported greater swimming ability than women—despite the fact that men are four times as likely to drown as females. They also found younger respondents reported greater swimming ability than older respondents.

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How can water-related injuries be prevented?

- Do not venture into open water (lakes, rivers, ocean, etc.) without knowing the possible dangers linked to the water and weather conditions at that specific site.
- Always swim with a buddy and select sites with lifeguards.
- Know your limits—drowning often happens when a person tires.
- Learn to swim, but don't overestimate your swimming ability. Teaching children to swim at a young age is good, but don't rely on it to prevent drowning for children younger than 4 years, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Designate a responsible adult to watch young children around all water, including bathtubs. Avoid all distractions while watching children. Drowning can occur in minutes.
- Do not use air-filled or foam devices in place of life jackets. These toys are not designed to keep swimmers safe.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before or during swimming or supervising children around water.
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). In the time it takes paramedics to arrive these skills could save a life.
- Install barriers around residential pools, but don't rely on them alone. (NYS law requires all residential pools to have barriers on all sides. Additionally all new or newly modified pools must be equipped with alarms and entrapment protection features.)

For more information on swimming safety, visit:

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/drown.htm

<http://www.cpsc.gov/nsn/drowning.html>

<http://drowningpreventionfoundation.us/>

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