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# Six Surprising Strategies for Summer Swimming Safety

Health &amp; Wellness

## OVERVIEW

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## PHOTOS



With the summer swimming season fast approaching, it's the perfect time to talk about safety strategies around the water. Cars have seat belts, child car seats and airbags, but when it comes to pools, water parks and beaches, we do it the old fashioned way – we primarily rely on the sense of sight. Too often, water safety takes a reactive rescue and resuscitation approach. However, proactive prevention should be emphasized so that rescue and resuscitation are not necessary.

When it comes to motor vehicle safety, imagine if seat belts, child car seats and airbags were never implemented. If doctors, nurses and paramedics stood by waiting to help individuals injured in car accidents, without proactive safety guards in place. There would be significantly more injuries and deaths.

Thousands of infants, children, teens, adults and elders burst through the pool gates each summer with fun on

their minds. At its best, a pool is a fun-filled, memory-making splashing good time. At its worst, it can be a water-filled basin of potential problems. The grave reality is that any body of water can easily take a life.

Fatal drowning is the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for children 1 to 14 years old. There's hope - lives also can easily be protected and drowning prevented.

Aquatic Safety Research Group, LLC (ASRG) presents Six Surprising Strategies for summer swimming safety. ASRG wants everyone to enjoy the pool safely this summer and for a lifetime.



### 1. In-water Supervision – Yes, you gotta get wet!

Supervision is a super lifesaving strategy. Lifeguards scan the pool and enforce the rules. However, distraction is prevalent, even if it is not intentional when performing any simple task, such as watching the water. While lifeguards save lives it is critical not to rely only on lifeguard supervision. Parents and guardians must also vigilantly supervise their children – and not just from the pool deck. This is particularly true for backyard pools, where parents and guardians are usually the only supervisors. Parents and guardians laying in a lounge chair and watching their children are subject to a myriad of internal noise and external distractions. The National Safety Council found that multitasking for the brain is a myth – the brain cannot handle tasks simultaneously. Texting, talking on the phone, socializing, basking in the sun and reading all take attention away from children in the water. Even

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thoughts or internal conversation of a parent or guardian while his/her eyes are on the water can be distraction. Children can slip quickly and quietly under the surface in seconds. Therefore, **in-water supervision** must be exercised – yes you gotta get wet. A parent or guardian should be arm's length from their child in the swimming pool. As the Lifesaving Society of Canada says, "if you're more than an arm's length away, you've gone too far."



## 2. Floaties Won't Do - Swimming Pools need Lifejackets Too

Lifejackets are the cheapest and most effective form of insurance you can buy. Lifejackets should be used in all bodies of water, including public and residential pools. Lifejacket use in boats and open water is critical. However, this lifesaving strategy needs to be expanded to require lifejacket use in ALL bodies of water, including pools. Appropriately fitted U.S. Coast Guard Approved Lifejackets Type 3 should be used for all non-swimmers. Flotation devices such as arm floaties won't do because the child's head can easily be submerged and many flotation devices can deflate or fall off. It's no secret – lifejackets carry a negative stigma. Many don't like wearing them or may not like how they look. Today's lifejackets are different. They are much more comfortable and fashionable than the traditional orange lifejackets. A cultural shift is needed. Lifejackets in pools should become the norm. Pools nationwide have jumped in with lifejacket loaner programs and the free Note & Float™ program. Penn State University and Upper St. Claire, Pa. are among the aquatic facilities that utilize Note & Float™ - identifying non-swimmers with a wristband and requiring they wear a lifejacket. With greater exposure to lifejackets, lifejackets for non-swimmers in all bodies of water can become accepted, normalized and second-nature. When seatbelts were first required, people were resistant to change their behaviors. Many still might not like to wear seatbelts, but it is regular practice in our culture to "buckle-up" for safety - and it does save lives. Have a hand in changing the culture. Don't just buckle up your child in the car. Buckle up your non-swimming child in a lifejacket in and around the water, until your child is a proficient swimmer on his/her own.



## 3. Swim Lessons Early and Often

Swim lessons can significantly help children become safer in the water. Data shows

learning to swim at an earlier age may actually lower drowning rates in children under the age of 4. The American Academy of Pediatrics reversed its previous stance that children between the ages of 1 and 3 were not developmentally ready to swim. Start lessons early with a good instructor to get children comfortable in the water at a young age. Before children can proficiently swim on their own they should also wear a *lifejacket* (when not in lessons) and parents should exercise *in-water supervision*. While it is important to start children swimming at an early age, swim lessons aren't just for the young. Everyone should learn to swim. Swim lessons are tailored to individuals of all ages - adult lessons are available and rewarding. Additionally, many classes are offered for individuals with disabilities. Learning to swim helps individuals become safer in the water, whether the goal is to swim recreationally or to pursue a world of other fun sports including competitive swimming, lifeguarding, SCUBA diving, wind surfing, surfing and water polo.



#### 4. Beware of Pool Parties

Pool parties are a fun and active way to celebrate a birthday. Kids can play in a clean environment and have a ball. However, parents often assume there is sufficient supervision at the party and simply drop their children off. Over a five-year period, data shows nearly two-thirds of pool deaths occurred during a planned group swimming activity, typically a pool party (Redwoods Insurance Group). Supervision is a repetitive, basic task subject to natural internal noise and external distraction for any human being, including lifeguards and the party hosting parents or guardians. Additionally, pool parties are a major form of miscommunication - parents often assume lifeguards are watching the children and lifeguards assume parents are watching the children. Instead of double coverage there is double trouble. If pool owners plan a backyard pool party, they should hire lifeguards for an extra layer of protection. However, even if both the hosting parents and lifeguards will be watching the kids, guests' parents still should accompany children to birthday parties and provide *in-water supervision*. Also, birthday party hosts should swim test guests and require non-swimmers wear lifejackets. This way, individuals who can't swim, still can have fun with the rest of the party, without fear of sinking. Camps, schools, scouts and other group outings to any body of water also should use these guidelines.



#### 5. Water Safety Needs Signs

Research shows that the yellow diamond signs with only a deer pictured in the center of the sign reduces deer vs. car collisions by 35 percent. The same type of signs should be used to remind people about the most important pool warnings. All pools should have appropriate safety signage, including residential pools. Swimming pools are guilty of sign pollution. Rather than long lists of pool rules and regulations, four warnings should be posted at all pools. The four big warnings are effective reminders just like the highway signs - 1. watch your children, 2. non-swimmers should wear lifejackets and 3. no diving into shallow water and 4. no prolonged breath-holding. While the first three are self-explanatory, "no prolonged breath-holding" also is important. Competitive, repetitive breath-holding can lead to unconsciousness and death and should be banned in all pools. Also, many lifeguards and parents have failed to respond to unconscious victims because they thought the person was holding his/her breath. Banning breath-holding will eliminate this fatal, delayed response. Warn with these vitally important signs at your home pool this summer. This will help improve pool safety by reminding others to watch their children, saving lives through banning breath-holding, floating non-swimmers and preventing injury and deaths from warning against diving into shallow water (less than 5 feet).

**6. Think Positive**

While water safety articles can be scary and may worry some parents, it is important to know that drowning rates in America have consistently decreased in recent years. Also, worldwide, America has one of the lowest drowning rates. So, don't be afraid to take your child in the water. Be sure to do it with a smile on your face and just have fun in the water.

Using these six strategies for swimming safety will make your summer safer and more enjoyable.

For more information about water safety:

Aquatic Safety Research Group - [www.AquaticSafetyGroup.com](http://www.AquaticSafetyGroup.com)

National Drowning Prevention Alliance - [NDPA.org](http://NDPA.org)

Center for Disease Control - [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Association of Aquatic Professionals - [associationofaquaticprofessionals.org](http://associationofaquaticprofessionals.org)

Shallow Water Blackout Prevention - [www.Shallowwaterblackoutprevention.org](http://www.Shallowwaterblackoutprevention.org)