

Title

By The Ottawa Drowning Prevention Coalition



According to The Canadian Red Cross there are, on average, 500 deaths due to drowning across the country every year. Among Ontario children aged five and under, drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death. For every toddler drowning death, there are three to five near drownings that require hospitalization. Of these near drownings, one in five will suffer permanent brain damage. While most cases of drowning are entirely preventable, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) reported that 13 per cent of deaths between 1999-2001 were due to drowning.

Drowning is a quick and silent killer. It can happen in a matter of seconds. In the time it takes to:

- Run inside and get a towel (10 seconds), a child near a pool can become submerged.
- Answer the phone (two minutes), a submerged child can lose consciousness.
- Read a page of your favourite magazine at the beach (two to four minutes), a submerged child can stop breathing.
- Sign for a package at your front door (four to six minutes), a submerged child can sustain permanent brain damage.

Children are at risk of drowning all year long. Most drownings do not involve swimming but occur when young children walk or play near water and fall in. As the weather gets warmer in the springtime, the risk of drowning increases as ponds, lakes and rivers begin to thaw and water currents can be very fast. During the warmer summer months, there is an even greater risk of drowning as families find ways to cool off by spending time at swimming pools, going to beaches and playing around other bodies of water.

Toddlers are especially vulnerable because they are mobile and very curious. As a result they need close and constant supervision by an adult. Children under five

years of age are the least capable to self-rescue of any age group. Patterns of drowning in young children show that they most often drown in backyard swimming pools, bathtubs, rivers and lakes, hot tubs, ditches and ponds. Forty percent of infants and young children who drowned were not being supervised.

Although the statistics are alarming, it is important to remember that drowning is entirely preventable. Children under five years old do not know how to swim on their own. Parents and caregivers are reminded to keep children within arm's reach when in the water or close to water. Older children should be enrolled in swimming lessons and educated about the dangers of playing in and near water.

Reduce the risks by remembering these key messages:

Safety in the bathtub

- Do not use infant bath rings or bath seats. They can tip over easily and trap a young infant.
- Keep toddlers out of the bathroom except when supervised.
- Babysitters should not be expected to bathe children.
- Drain the bathtub after bathing.

Safety at the beach and pool

- Always stay within sight and arm's reach of your child.
- Use a personal flotation device (PFD) with young children and weak swimmers that are appropriate for the child's size.
- Floating toys, which attract children, should be removed when the pool is not in use.
- Make sure all pools (above-ground, in-ground and inflatable), hot tubs and fishponds have proper fencing (preferably four-sided): must be at least 1.5 m (5 feet) high with a self-latching and self-closing gate.

Be prepared for an emergency

- Keep a first aid kit, a telephone and emergency numbers close by the pool.

- Have a rope, a solid pole or a life ring to provide assistance to a person in trouble.
- Enroll yourself and your children in swimming lessons.
- Learn infant and child CPR and First Aid.

Ottawa Drowning Prevention Coalition

The Ottawa Drowning Prevention Coalition (ODPC) is made up of representatives from Ottawa Public Health, Canadian Red Cross, CHEO's Plan-it Safe, City of Ottawa's Parks and Recreation, Ottawa Police Services Marine and Dive Unit, the Ottawa Paramedic Service, the Lifesaving Society and interested individuals and community agencies from across the city of Ottawa. The ODPC is committed to raising awareness around water safety and drowning prevention for parents/caregivers and children/ youth in the Ottawa area. The goal of the ODPC is to prevent incidents of drowning, near-drowning and near-drowning related injuries in the Ottawa area through public awareness, advocacy and education.

Gillian Baker, Community Services Coordinator of The Canadian Red Cross, stresses that, "Supervision of children in, on and around the water is a full-time job. It should not be combined with chatting on the phone, barbecuing or other distractions. Supervision must be constant and vigilant."

The City of Ottawa's pool enclosure by-law requires all pools capable of holding 60 cm (24 inches) or more of water to have a fence that is at least 1.5 metres (5 feet) with a lockable, self-closing and self-latching gate. This includes above-ground, in-ground and inflatable pools, hot tubs and fishponds.

"It is important to remember that a small child can drown in as little as ten seconds and in just a few inches of water," according to Christine Wagg, of the Lifesaving Society. "Supervision and fencing are the keys to reducing drowning and near-drownings."

For more information on drowning prevention and the pool enclosure by-law, call or visit:

- Ottawa Public Health Info
www.ottawa.ca/health 613-580-6744
- Canadian Red Cross

www.redcross.ca 613-560-7220

- Lifesaving Society
www.lifesavingsociety.com

This article originally appeared in the April 2010 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.