

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

*Anti-entrapment law provides more protection for children*

**Columbus, GA** — 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 Columbus, and it could even be deadly. Children can get into trouble in a matter of seconds when around water, so Safe Kids Columbus 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 Christy Hubbard, coordinator of Safe Kids Columbus. “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.”

To help keep kids safe this pool season, Safe Kids Columbus 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.
- 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 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 the American Red Cross at <http://www.redcross.org/> for information about local CPR classes.
- 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.

Even a near-drowning incident can have lifelong consequences. Kids who survive a near-drowning may have brain damage, and 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 Hubbard. When there are children in or near the water, adults should take turns serving as the designated “Water Watcher,” paying undivided attention. Visit [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org) to download a free Water Watcher badge.

## **Anti-Entrapment Law Will Help Save Lives**

One of the most horrific ways for a child to be injured or killed in a pool or hot tub is entrapment. On Dec. 19, 2007, President Bush signed the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act into law. The law is named for the granddaughter of former Secretary of State James A. Baker, III. Graeme died tragically at the age of 7 in 2002 after being trapped under water due to the suction from a spa drain.

The law makes it illegal to manufacture, distribute or sell drain covers that do not adhere to the standards for anti-entrapment safety set by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). The Act also requires public pools and spas to be equipped with these anti-entrapment drain covers as well as a device to disable the drain in the event of an entrapment. Another important component of the law is that it establishes a grant program to reward states that adopt comprehensive laws mandating certain safety devices for all pools and spas. Additionally, the law creates a national drowning prevention education program and media campaign administered by the CPSC.

For more information about drowning and water safety, call Safe Kids Columbus at (706) 321-6183 or visit [www.safekidscolumbusga.com](http://www.safekidscolumbusga.com).

Safe Kids Columbus works to prevent accidental childhood injury, the leading killer of children 14 and under. Its members include public safety agencies, teachers, EMTs, county commissioners, health educators, nurses, civic groups, faith-based organizations, public health organizations, local government, and many others concerned about the well being of our children. Safe Kids Columbus is a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations dedicated to preventing accidental injury. Safe Kids Columbus was founded in 1998 and is led by the Columbus Health Department.

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