



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
May 25, 2022

Contact: Kim Y. Hylander
Senior Communications Analyst
Office: 703-792-6162
Cell: 571-722-8689
Email: khylander@pwcgov.org

Prevent Drownings: Practice Water Safety

The first holiday of the summer, Memorial Day, is fast approaching. Schools will be closing for the season and families will begin planning their summer vacation. For many, that will include heading to waterparks, pools, spas, or recreational areas that may be in or near water. When doing so, the Prince William County Fire and Rescue System advises families to take the necessary precautions to prevent drownings.

In 2019, an estimated 236,000 people died from drowning, making it a major public health problem, worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In the U.S., nearly 4,000 deaths occur yearly from drowning; of those, approximately 800 are children. A small child can drown in just a few centimeters of water as a bucket of water. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states, among children, ages 1- 4, more die from drowning than any other cause of death except birth defects. For children ages 1 – 14, fatal drowning is the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death following motor vehicle crashes. According to a CDC study conducted by Researcher Merianne Spencer, the highest risk locations for drowning vary by age:

- Less than 1 year old: two thirds drowned in bathtubs
- Ages 1 – 13: a high percentage of deaths occurred in swimming pools
- Ages 14 - 17: drowning occurred in natural waters like lakes, rivers, and oceans

Most fatal submersions occur at residential locations. Of those involving younger children, adults are present, but become distracted, resulting in a lapse of adult supervision. People assume, when a person is drowning, they will be able to hear them drowning or know when they are in trouble, but on the contrary, someone struggling to stay afloat and breathe is often unable to wave their arms or call for help; therefore, they drown in silence without attracting attention; drowning is swift and silent.

Suction Entrapment in Pools, Spas/Hot Tubs & Whirlpool Bathtubs

Hot tubs, spas and whirlpool bathtubs are often overlooked as a drowning danger for children. Incidents of unintentional drownings among these water-related recreational devices result in falls into the water, hair that becomes tangled in drains or jets, or from body parts becoming trapped.

The Prince William County Fire and Rescue System Chief Tim Keen urges residents to be vigilant in preventing injuries and drownings by taking the following precautions when you and your loved ones are in or near water:

-more-

May 25, 2022

Prevent Drownings: Practice Water Safety

Page 2

- **NEVER** leave a child unsupervised near a pool, spa, bathtub, toilet, water-filled bucket, pond, or any standing body of water for even a second!
- **ALWAYS** designate a responsible adult to be the “Water Watcher” of young children while in and around water. The designated adult should not be involved in other distracting activities, i.e., answering the phone, playing games, etc.
- Install a four-sided, 5-foot fence with a gate. The gate should be self-closing and self-latching (latches should be above a child’s reach). The fence should surround any pool or spa with openings no more than 4 inches wide to prevent children from squeezing through the spaces. For more information visit the [Building Development Division](#) and click on Residential Pools, Spas, & Hot Tubs listed under Improvements & Construction.
- **DO NOT** use flotation devices, i.e., air-filled or foam toys, noodles, or inner tubes in place of life jackets/PFDS (personal flotation devices). Many flotation devices are considered as toys and not designed to keep swimmers safe.
- **DO NOT** allow children to play in and around the pool or spa area. Remove all toys, balls, and floats from around or in a pool.
- **DO NOT** allow under water play in a hot tub or spa.
- Know where the pump cutoff switch is located, in the hot tub or spa, so it can be turned off in an emergency.
- Keep a locked safety cover on the hot tub or spa when not in use.
- Learn to swim; formal swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning among children 1 – 4 years of age.
- Avoid swimming after dark and in muddy waters of lakes, ponds, and rivers.
- Regardless of one’s swimming ability, size of the boat or distance to be traveled, require all persons to wear U.S. Coast Guard approved lifejackets/personal flotation devices (PFDS) when boating or involved in water-related recreational activities.
- **DO NOT** dive into above-ground pools, shallow water, or water where you don’t know the depth. Diving into shallow water can cause spinal injuries.
- **ALWAYS** swim and/or boat with a buddy and select areas with lifeguards.
- Avoid alcohol consumption or use of other drugs while supervising children during recreational water activities or participating in recreational water activities.
- Check the local weather conditions prior to engaging in recreational water activities.
- Learn CPR! It saves lives.

Individuals can reduce, even eliminate, water-related injuries and deaths by simply changing their behavior. Hence, before heading to the park, beach, or local neighborhood pool, implement safety measures that will protect you and your loved ones when in or near water.

For more information, visit the World Health Organization www.who.int/, Center for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/ Safe Kids Worldwide www.safekids.org, Statista statista.com, and Consumer Product Safety Commission’s Pool or Spa Submersion: Estimated Nonfatal Drowning Injuries and Reported Drownings 2021 Report at cpsc.gov.

-end-