

Safety Tips for Swimmers

Swimming injuries, drownings and deaths are preventable by following simple safety rules. These rules apply around all bodies of water, from the beach or lake to private pools and bathtubs. Be aware that any pools that have public access must comply with the BC Pool Regulation.

How can I stay safe when swimming?

Look for and read the signs

Read the signs posted in a swimming area and follow the safety information. Signs and rules are there to protect you and to keep pools clean and germ-free.

Walk, do not run

Never run on the pool deck. This area can be very slippery, especially when there is water on the deck.

Be careful getting in and out of the pool

Use a handrail whenever possible to prevent slipping or falling. When getting out of the water, avoid climbing on slippery or other unstable surfaces.

Look before you leap or dive in

Shallow water, underwater logs or big rocks are all dangerous when diving into lakes or swimming holes and can cause serious injury. When at a pool or other swimming area, only dive into areas where it is safe to dive. Look for no diving signs.

Always check your surroundings and enter the water slowly with your feet first. Check the area each time before you enter the water, as swimming conditions or surroundings may change. You may not always be able to see underwater swimmers, toys and other objects that can cause harm. Shallow water, underwater logs or big rocks can cause serious injury.

Stay within your abilities

When you go in the water, swim only where you feel comfortable. Do not go farther or deeper than you can handle. At beaches, swim parallel to the shore, and stay inside marked areas. Be aware that cold water or rough conditions can impact your swimming abilities.

Never swim alone

Use the “buddy system” and take a friend or responsible adult with you who is a strong swimmer. Make sure you watch out for each other. Even when a lifeguard is around, it is best to have a “buddy”.

Play carefully

Wrestling and tumbling in any water body can be very dangerous. You could hit your head against pool walls, floors or rocks and become unconscious. If this happens and you do not get help quickly, you could drown.

Do not drink alcohol

Injuries involving alcohol are a common problem around water bodies, including private pools, hot tubs, beaches and swimming holes. Alcohol can make accidents worse because it slows down your reaction time. Alcohol can also put you to sleep. This is especially dangerous in a hot tub. If you are in or around any water body, do not drink alcohol.

Watch for hazards

Never play around skimmers or pool drains. In a pool or hot tub water is always pumping through a filter system. The filter pulls water out of the pool through a drain and into pipes. Parts of your body, fingers, toes, arms, legs or torso and hair can easily become caught in the suction of these drains. Drains with strong suction can hold you under water and possibly lead to drowning. If you have long hair, you should wear a bathing cap or securely tie back your hair in a short braid or bun. You should never put your head underwater in a whirlpool or hot tub.

Watch for underwater traps

Some railings, ladders or removable pool equipment can create small spaces that can trap people underwater. Sometimes getting trapped under water will lead to drowning. If you notice underwater equipment that could trap you, talk to a pool supervisor, owner or lifeguard about your concerns.

Bodies of water such as lakes, rivers and oceans have many hidden/unknown dangers. This includes underwater logs, sudden drop offs, algae blooms or tidal currents. Be aware of the potential dangers, know your swimming ability, have a “buddy” and stay within arms reach of children. Obey any posted warnings and ask other people if they know of any trouble spots in the area. Contact the nearest health unit or local government to get water quality results before you swim.

Take a first aid course

Take a first aid course that teaches:

- Artificial respiration, sometimes called the “Breath of Life”

- Child Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
- Self-rescue and skills for rescuing others

Many agencies offer these courses for parents. For more information, visit St. John Ambulance at www.sja.ca/en/first-aid-training/find-your-course.

Wear life jackets/Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

Always wear life jackets or PFDs on a boat or dock. Life jackets/PFDs can also be worn when swimming, but children still need adult supervision. Life jackets/PFDs are never a replacement for adult supervision. Check the label to make sure that your life jacket/PFD is Transport Canada approved, and that it is the right size for your weight.

How can I protect my child?

Never leave your child alone

Drowning is silent and can happen in seconds. A person can drown in just a few centimetres of water (e.g. bathtub). ‘Non-swimmers’ and young children (0-12 years old) need constant supervision by a responsible adult when they are in or around water. Infants and toddlers (0-5 years old) must always be within arm’s reach of a responsible adult when they are in or near water. Older children (12-17 years old) should always have someone nearby and use the “buddy system”.

Never let children play in hot tubs

Hot water can quickly affect a child’s small body and you should limit the amount of time a child spends in a hot tub. To learn more about the health concerns related to hot tub use, see [HealthLinkBC File #27a Residential Hot Tubs and Pools: Health and Safety Tips](#).

Use sunscreen

Protect your children from UV rays (Ultraviolet Radiation). Wear sun protective clothing, seek shade and use “waterproof” sunscreen. Re-apply sunscreen often as even waterproof sunscreen will wear off. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #26 Sun Safety for Children](#).

How can I make my pool safe?

Fence off your pool

Make sure there is an enclosure such as a fence at least 1.5m (5ft) high around your pool with a gate that a child cannot open. Make sure the gate is always closed and locked to protect your child and other children in the neighbourhood. Check if there are local government by-laws that address swimming pool safety.

Cover drains and suction hazards

Make sure drain covers are specifically designed to prevent suction hazards. If a pool drain cover is missing, do not use the pool until the cover is replaced. If you are in charge of purchasing or installing a replacement drain cover, make sure that the new cover is identical to the original or seek the advice of a qualified pool consultant to find an equivalent.

Keep your pool clean

Dirty pools grow bacteria and other germs that can make you sick. A few good habits help keep a clean and healthy environment in your pool:

- Always wash or shower before entering a pool. Do not track dirt from outside into the pool
- Make sure you wear a proper bathing suit. Do not swim in street clothes or underwear
- Use swim-specific diaper (reusable or disposable options are available). A non-swim diaper will not perform well in water
- Do not enter a pool if you are or have been sick, have had diarrhea or vomiting in the past 48 hours
- Do not enter the pool with open wounds/sores
- Never bring food or drinks in the pool as crumbs or spills can increase bacteria and attract pests. If a glass, cup or dish breaks, you will need to drain the pool so you can clean it and ensure all the broken pieces are removed
- Follow the operation and maintenance instructions for your pool circulation system. You can get this information from your pool supplier

Accessibility

Make sure all individuals who will use your pool or hot tub can easily get in and out.

Plan for safety

Always be on the lookout for hidden dangers. Broken fittings and sharp edges can cause cuts, bruises and other injuries. Make sure these issues are fixed before you let anyone use the pool. Keep rescue equipment on hand, such as a rope or floatation device (safety ring).