Water safety and drowning prevention

Timing is critical when it comes to saving your baby or your child from a near-drowning (submersion) episode. If enough oxygen is not being delivered to the brain, severe damage can occur within a few minutes. If your child's heart has stopped beating for more than eight to 10 minutes, their chances of surviving are greatly reduced.

Where can drowning happen?
Drowning can happen in as little as 20 seconds, even in shallow water that is only inches deep. Most drowning or near-drowning cases happen in backyard pools, bath tubs and inflatable pools. Natural bodies of water, toilets and drainage sites are other places where drowning can occur. Always supervise children near any water and keep young children within arm's reach.

Delayed drowning
Delayed drowning happens when a baby or a child has complications after a near-drowning episode. This can occur from one to 24 hours after the rescue. If your baby or your child has had a near-drowning experience, get them to see a doctor even if they appear to be well. Symptoms of delayed drowning include:

- difficulty breathing
- fever
- being moody or very sleepy.

How can you tell if your baby or your child is drowning?
Be sure to monitor your child at all times when they are in, or near, water. Watch for signs of drowning because a child in distress will be unable to yell for help.

Signs of drowning
- head tilted back with mouth open
- floating face down
- gasping for air.

Rescue
Avoid putting yourself at risk trying to save your child
You should not put your life in danger trying to rescue your baby or your child. If your only option is to enter the water, bring a flotation device with you. This can be a life-jacket or even a pool noodle.

CPR
CPR stands for cardiopulmonary resuscitation. CPR is an emergency procedure that involves a combination of chest compressions and rescue breaths (mouth-to-mouth resuscitation). CPR given to a baby younger than 12 months of age is different from CPR given to an older child.
Once you are safely out of the water and if your child is not responsive, not breathing or only gasping, call for help and begin CPR right away.

### Assess your child’s state

#### Checking for alertness and injuries

Check to see if **your baby** is responsive by rubbing their back, flicking their feet, and calling their name.

Check to see if **your child** is responsive by tapping them on the shoulder and asking loudly,"Are you OK?"

- If you get an answer or a physical response, quickly check to see if they have any injuries. If they need medical attention, have someone call 911 right away.
- If you get no answer or physical response, shout for help, ask someone to call 911 and have them get an AED (automated external defibrillator) right away, if available, while you begin CPR. If you are alone, call 911 from a cell phone that you can put on speaker and begin CPR.

#### Check for breathing

Check for normal breathing (no gasping) by watching your child's chest for any movement. If you are alone, make sure your child is breathing normally before you leave to call 911. Carry your baby with you to make the call.

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### Swimming safety

#### Backyard swimming pools

If you have a backyard swimming pool, check to make sure that it follows local by-laws. Make sure a fence surrounds the pool on all sides. The pool should be completely fenced-in if a child could otherwise exit the house through sliding doors and directly enter the pool unsupervised.

A pool fence should be 1.2 metres (4 feet) high and have a self-latching gate. The latch should be out of your child's reach so they cannot open it on their own. Keep toys and furniture away from the pool fence to prevent children from climbing over it to get into the pool.

If any door in the house leads directly to the pool, it should close by itself and have a lock that a child cannot reach and open. The pool should always have a safety cover over it when it is not in use.

#### Other pool safety tips

- Always have an adult watching children in the pool. This adult should know basic life
saving skills and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for a baby and a child.

- Keep life saving equipment, such as a safety ring with a rope, near the pool.
- Enrol children in swimming and water safety lessons by the time they are age four. Water safety programs for adults and younger children are also a good idea.
- Even if your child has taken swimming lessons, have an adult watch them closely in and around water.
- Children can drown in seconds; do not turn away to answer the phone or focus on something else. Do not assume that a child in trouble will be able to make noise to alert you.
- Always check the pool first if a child is missing.

Lakes and rivers
Because lakes and rivers are not fenced in, it is even more important to watch children closely when at the cottage or the beach. Remember these safety tips.

- Give your children your full attention. Make sure they know to always tell an adult before they go swimming. Young children should always be supervised when playing in or around water.
- Children under the age of three or children who cannot swim should wear a life jacket or personal flotation device (PFD) in or around water. Young children should always be within arm's reach.
- Put children on a buddy system so that if one is in trouble the other can call for help.
- Make sure children swim close to shore. They should be able to see you at all times.
- Teach young children how to swim or play within arm's reach.
- Swim at supervised waterfronts and beaches.
- Choose a safe place to swim. Check for hazards on the beach and in the water, including water pollution levels.
- Watch for boats and jet skis while swimming.

Boating safety

By law, boaters must have life jackets or PFDs for each person aboard the boat. Life jackets offer a higher level of protection, but PFDs may be less bulky and more comfortable.

No matter which option you choose, it must be the right size, fit properly and be in good condition. If you want your child to wear a life jacket or PFD, set a good example and do the same.

Pay special attention to your children's PFDs. Each one should be chosen according to your child's size and weight, have a collar to keep their head up in the water, a handle on the collar.
to lift them and a safety strap so the PFD does not slide up over the head.

Other boating safety tips

- Do not rock the boat. Move slowly when you enter the boat because it could tip over, or tip you out, if you are not careful.
- Remind children to keep their arms, legs and head inside the boat at all times.
- At least one adult should be able to see the child at all times to make sure the child does not fall into the water. Even if the water is shallow, it might be in a rocky area.
- If sleeping on the boat, make sure young children cannot open a door or window and get outside unsupervised.

Bath time

Drowning in a bath tub is not unusual. This is because very young children do not have the motor skills to lift their heads above water or get themselves out of the water if they are in danger. Small children can even drown in water that is just a few centimetres deep.

Once an infant is in the tub, pay full attention to them. Do not turn your back or rely on another child to watch them.

Lock the door to the bathroom to prevent a child from entering and getting into dangerous situations there. For example, they may attempt to run a bath on their own in the same way they have seen a parent do it.

Many parents use bathing aids such as bath seats or rings to free up their hands to wash their baby. These plastic seats use suction cups to attach to the bottom of the tub and are designed to secure an infant until they can sit up unassisted. Although a bath seat can be convenient, it is not a safety device. Never leave an infant unattended while they are placed in one.

Whether or not you use a bath seat, children in the tub should be within arm’s reach at all times and should not be left alone even for a second.

When to call a doctor

Get medical attention right away if you see any of these signs in your baby or your child:

- persistent coughing
- difficulty breathing
- blue colour on skin and lips
- loss of consciousness (fainting)
- fever
- being moody or very sleepy.

Key points

- Drowning can occur in as little as 20 seconds.
- Delayed drowning can occur one to 24 hours after a near-drowning rescue. Be sure to
monitor your child, and see a doctor right away if they lose consciousness or have difficulty breathing.

- Most accidents happen when swimming, boating or bathing in the bath tub.
- Always supervise children near any water and keep young children within arm's reach.

- Do not put your life at risk trying to save your child. If you must enter the water to perform a rescue, bring a flotation device with you.
- If your child is unconscious and not breathing, have someone call 911 and get an AED right away.