

Be water wise

Your guide to water safety



Facts about drowning

- Drowning is the leading cause of injury-related death among children between 1 and 4 years old.
- Children less than a year old are more likely to drown at home in the bathtub or a bucket.
- Drowning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children 19 and under.

Home

- Make sure you have everything you need for bath time, before placing your child in the tub. **Young children can drown in as little as one inch of water** and should be within an arm's reach of an adult at all times.
- Sitting devices or baby bathtubs do not prevent drowning. Always follow manufacture instructions for safe use.
- Empty and store all buckets, containers and kiddie pools immediately after use.

Swimming

- Assign a **water watcher** to watch children while they are in or near water, even if they know how to swim. **This person should be free of all distractions.**
- Keep young children and weak swimmers within arm's reach of an adult and wearing a life jacket at all times. Older children should always swim with a buddy.
- Keep a phone near you while watching children swim and only use it to call for help.
- Learn CPR and basic water rescue skills. It is important to know how to respond in an emergency without putting yourself at risk.

Pools

- A pool fence should surround all sides of the pool and be at least four feet tall with self-closing and self-latching gates.
- Have alarms on every door and window leading to the pool area.

Open water

- Use swimming and recreational areas when possible. Look for signs about local open water hazards.
- Children should understand that swimming in open water is different from swimming in a pool. There are hidden hazards, such as; limited visibility, sudden drop-offs, uneven surfaces, currents and undertow. Teach children to enter the water feet-first.
- Ensure that children wear a United States Coast Guard-approved life jacket at all times when in or near open bodies of water.

Teach your child to swim and these five water survival skills:

- 1 Step or jump into water over your head and return to the surface.
- 2 Float or tread water for one minute.
- 3 Turn around in a full circle and find an exit.
- 4 Swim 25 yards to exit the water.
- 5 Exit the water. If in a pool, be able to exit without using the ladder.

Each child is different, consider their age, development and how often they are around water to know when they are ready for swim lessons.

Boating safely with children

Fact: In 2018, 77% of all fatal boating accident victims drowned, and of those who drowned, 84% were not wearing a life jacket.

- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
- Young kids are at a higher risk for hypothermia, so take extra precautions to keep them warm. Wrap them in a blanket or dry towel when they seem cold or are shivering.
- Follow the U.S. Coast Guard recommendations for boating safely.

Age requirements for child drivers of boats and personal watercrafts

Who may operate a boat?

Those **less than 12 years of age:**

- May legally operate a boat powered by a motor of no more than six horsepower without restrictions.
- May legally operate a boat powered by a motor of more than six horsepower, but no more than 35 horsepower, only if they:
 1. have been issued a boating safety certificate and have it on board **and**
 2. are directly supervised on board by a person at least 16 years of age.
- May not legally operate a boat powered by a motor of more than 35 horsepower under any conditions.

Those **born on or after July 1, 1996**, may legally operate a motorized boat over six horsepower only if they have been issued a boating safety certificate and have it in their possession.

Those **born before July 1, 1996**, may legally operate a boat without restrictions.

Who may operate a personal watercraft

Those **less than 14 years of age** may not legally operate a personal watercraft (PWC) (i.e., jet ski, wave runner).

Those **14 and 15 years of age** may legally operate a PWC if they have obtained a boating safety certificate **and** are:

- Accompanied on board by their parent, legal guardian or by a person who has been designated by the parent or legal guardian and is at least 21 years of age; **or**
- Operating or riding the PWC at a distance of not more than 100 feet from their parent legal guardian or by a person who has been designated by the parent or legal guardian and is at least 21 years of age.

Those **at least 16 years of age and born after Dec. 31, 1978**, may legally operate a PWC only if they have obtained a boating safety certificate.

Those **born on or before Dec. 31, 1978**, may operate a PWC legally without restrictions.

Contact us

For more information, contact the Injury Prevention Program of Helen DeVos Children's Hospital at Corewell Health Grand Rapids Hospitals: **616.391.SAFE (7233)** or visit **helendevoschildrens.org/injuryprevention**

If you have questions, email: **injuryprevention@helendevoschildrens.org**



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This handout does not take the place of a discussion with your health care team. Discuss any questions or concerns you may have with your health care team.

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