

Maura J. Rossman, M.D., Health Officer



Hazard of the Month: Swimming Safety

Drowning Prevention for Children:

Drowning is the number one cause of death for children aged 1-4 years old, and children can drown quickly and quietly. Follow these tips to help keep kids safe:

- Fence off and/or cover swimming areas when not in use.
- Empty bathtubs, buckets, and kiddie pools immediately after use.
- Never leave young children in water (including bathtubs and kiddie pools) without adult supervision, even for a moment.
- Don't divide attention between watching a child in water and other tasks.
- Enroll your child in swim lessons. Visit the <u>American Academy of Pediatrics page</u> to learn when and how to choose swim lessons.
- Learn what drowning looks like by visiting the <u>National Drowning Prevention Alliance</u>.
- Consider learning CPR to perform emergency resuscitation if needed, until professionals arrive. To find a CPR class near you, please visit the <u>American Red Cross CPR Training</u>.

Learn more about drowning prevention, including PSAs from parents of drowning victims, by visiting the <u>American Academy of Pediatrics</u>.

Swimming Pools:

Before you swim:

- Don't swim if you're sick, especially with diarrhea.
- Don't swim with open cuts or wounds. Cover them with waterproof bandages.



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- Apply waterproof sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) when swimming outdoors, even on cloudy days. Reapply every 90 minutes.
- Know your swimming abilities and those with you. Remember that even children who have taken swim lessons are not "drown-proof".
- Make sure a lifeguard is on duty and know where they are stationed.
- Do not consume alcohol or other drugs.

In the Pool:

- Don't swallow water.
- Don't spit, pee, or poop in the pool.
- Get out if you get too tired, too cold, or too thirsty.
- Never hold someone underwater.
- Make sure young children and weak swimmers wear life jackets. Remember, water wings, pool noodles, and inflatable toys are NOT proper flotation devices.
- Get the lifeguard's attention immediately if you need help or see another person in distress.

After the Pool:

- Thoroughly dry out your ears to prevent infection.
- Take a shower to wash off chlorine, bromine and other pool chemicals

To learn about pool regulation and licensing, visit Howard County Health Department's <u>Community Hygiene Program.</u>

Swimming in Ponds, Lakes, and Oceans:

Know Before You Go:

- Find out if the water is safe to swim in. Some bodies of water are closed because they contain dangerous amounts of sewage, chemicals, debris, or other hazards.
- Learn whether the water will be monitored by lifeguards. Consider extra precautions, like life jackets, if you are swimming at your own risk. Visit <u>Water Safety USA</u> to learn how to properly choose and wear a life jacket.
- Check the weather report to make sure conditions are safe for swimming. Rain, lightning, currents, and cold temperatures can increase risk of injury or death.
- Let someone on land know where you will be swimming, and for how long.

In the Water:

• Never swim alone, after consuming alcohol or other drugs, or after dark.



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- Avoid swallowing water and sand to keep germs and chemicals out of your body.
- Don't jump or dive into unfamiliar water. Trees, rocks, banks, and other underwater hazards can injure or kill.
- Get out of the water if it smells strongly unpleasant, looks discolored, or you notice pipes draining into the water. These are signs that the water is polluted and unsafe for swimming.
- Don't poop in the water. Make young children take mandatory bathroom breaks each hour.
- Make sure that young children and weak swimmers wear life jackets.
- In the ocean, keep an eye out for large, unexpected waves.
- If caught in a rip current, swim parallel to shore to escape it before swimming back to the beach. To learn how rip currents, form and why they can be dangerous, please visit the <u>National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration</u>.

After Swimming:

- Thoroughly dry out your ears to prevent infection.
- Wash hands with soap and water as soon as possible. If soap and water are unavailable, use hand sanitizer instead.
- Once available, shower with soap and water.

Use the resources below to learn more about staying safe in natural bodies of water: <u>USDA Forest Service, Water Safety</u> <u>CDC: Water Safety</u> <u>Maryland Department of Natural Resources: Stay Safe on the Water</u>

Rescue:

When you see someone in trouble in the water, notify the nearest lifeguard immediately! If there is no lifeguard and you must help them yourself, do NOT swim after them. Remember: **Reach, Throw, Row—Don't Go!**

Reach: Securely hold the dock or boat and **reach** out to the person with a paddle, stick, fishing pole, or arm.

Throw: If the person is out of reach, **throw** them a life ring, life jacket, or something else that floats.

Row: If the person is out of throwing distance, use paddles or oars to **row** your boat closer to them, or call out to a nearby boat.



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Don't Go: Do NOT **go** into the water to help unless you are trained in lifesaving—a drowning person can pull you under the water. Instead, call out for help, dial 911, and/or **go** find help nearby.