

Guide to Water Safety



A program of the American Trauma Society,
Pennsylvania Division



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General Water Safety

Water is a source of fun for all ages. It is crucial around any body of water though, to have fun within the boundaries of safe behavior. This means being prepared for all situations, looking out for yourself and looking out for those around you.

Know what you're doing before entering the water, consider all safety guidelines for swimming and diving, and know how and when to use a life jacket/personal flotation device (PFD). If you're a parent/guardian, understand **there is no substitute for constant and unrelenting supervision of children.**



General Water Safety

Always

Be sure everyone in your family can swim confidently by taking swimming lessons.

Assure children's safety by having them wear Coast Guard approved life jackets/PFDs.

Surround pool and yard with fencing at least five feet tall, with a latch out of the reach of small children.

Be prepared for emergencies by knowing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Call the American Red Cross, American Heart Association or your local hospital for training opportunities.

Never

Swim alone. Use the buddy system at all times.

Depend on floatable toys and rings to keep you afloat. Drowning can occur if these devices are punctured.

Drink alcohol in or around water.

Push or jump on others, or pretend you are drowning.

Operate any watercraft for the first time without taking a boating safety course.



Pools

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, on average, **390 children younger than 14** drown in residential swimming pools each year in the United States. Typically, these drownings occur in pools owned by their families. African-American youth are more than **5 times more likely** to drown than other youth, according to the CPSC. Recent data shows that on average, **4,900 children** in the same age group are treated in hospital emergency departments for submersion injuries each year. Use the following precautions when near a pool to prevent needless injury.



Never leave infants alone in or near water, and never rely on flotation devices as a substitute for constant supervision.

Keep children in your direct field of vision at all times. Create a clear view of the pool from the house, removing any free-standing obstacles.



Teach children to swim responsibly; reckless swimming and horseplay around the pool is a leading cause of water-related injuries.

Install a fence or other barrier, such as a wall, at least five feet high completely around the pool, without any foot-or hand holds that could allow easy pool access for children.



Make sure your home and community pools are equipped with depth markers, and make children aware of them.

Pools

Know all local emergency telephone numbers (911 or your local fire department). Keep rescue equipment and a cordless phone near the pool.

Keep all electrical appliances away from the pool area.

Double check all safety measures when installing your home pool and provide a checklist to go over with your family.

Follow the manufacturer's directions for safe installation, use and maintenance of a pool cover. Be sure to completely remove the cover to avoid the possibility of entrapment and/or drowning.

Store sanitizing chemicals carefully. Explosions and fires can occur if these chemicals are stored improperly, or mixed with other chemicals or elements.



Oceans, Lakes, Ponds & Rivers

Every summer, many Americans look forward to heading to the shore and inland waters. It's important to remember that natural bodies of water can be extremely dangerous and unpredictable. The majority of drownings in the United States occur in oceans, lakes, ponds and rivers. Keep these key safety measures in mind when enjoying these waters.

- Swim with a partner or group. Swimming in numbers dramatically reduces the risk of injury and drowning.
- Help prevent infant drowning by having them wear life jackets (PFDs) at all times. Wearing life jackets saves children's lives.
- Assess any possible hazards before entering the water.
- Never dive into cloudy or murky water.
- Avoid the water during bad weather.
- Don't overestimate your ability to swim and know your capacity for rescuing another person.
- Avoid swift-moving water and currents; they can pose great risks to even expert swimmers.
- Don't try to fight riptides and undertows. Ride the flow of the water until you catch your breath and get your bearings, then swim calmly parallel to the shore.



Diving

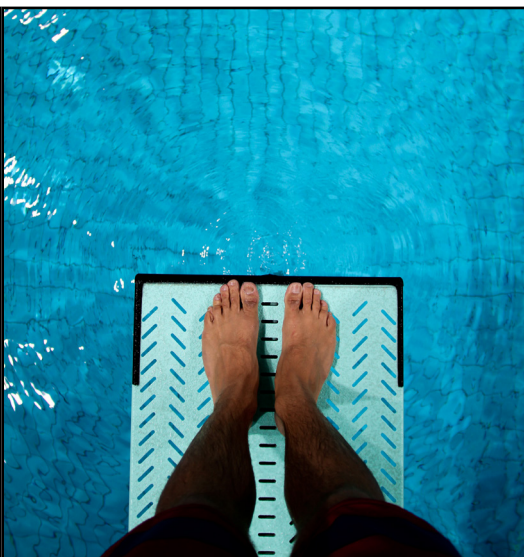
Diving headfirst into shallow water is the leading cause of water related spinal injuries. Approximately **9 out of 10** diving injuries occur in 6-feet of water or less. Use the following tips for both pools and natural bodies of water:

General Diving Guidelines

- Do not dive into any body of water until you have been taught by a qualified instructor.
- Always wade into the water to determine if it is deep enough to dive and if there are any obstacles.
- Obey all “No Diving” signs; they are meant to prevent you from diving into unsafe water, not to keep you from having fun.
- Do not attempt any dangerous or challenging dives without prior instruction and experience.
- Never dive headfirst into crashing waves.

Pool Guidelines

- Never dive headfirst into any above-ground or shallow in-ground pool.
- Check the depth, width and shape of any in-ground pool to determine if it is deep enough for diving. Pools equipped with diving boards are not necessarily safe for headfirst entry.
- Dive only off the end of the diving board – never off the side – without running or bouncing on the board more than once.
- Ensure only one person is on the diving board at a time. Head injuries are a common result of horseplay on diving boards.
- Wait until the water’s diving area is cleared of other swimmers before diving and swim away from the board immediately.
- Don’t dive at or through objects, such as inner tubes.
- Remove any earplugs before diving, as pressure can build while you descend under water.



Boating

Federal regulations require registration and an identification number for all powerboats and personal watercraft (PWC). Additionally, the U.S. Coast Guard and federal regulations require PFDs for each member on board, as well as a fire extinguisher. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, American Red Cross and several other agencies offer boating safety courses, with information available from your local marina and boat retailers. Remember, the key to safety on the water is operator knowledge and experience. Adopt the following guidelines when operating boats and PWCs:



- Always wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket (PFD) when boating. Keep it on when swimming, water skiing or jet skiing.
- Never mix alcohol with boating. Driving a boat or personal watercraft while under the influence of alcohol is as dangerous as driving drunk in an automobile. Alcohol, combined with the sun and wind, can affect your judgment when boating.
- Check weather and water conditions before leaving shore.



Boating

- Ensure that at least two people are aware of your intended course and time schedule, and include your boat's description and the names of everyone on board.
- Make sure your boat is properly maintained. Have your boat routinely inspected for safety and check all functions before getting out on the water.
- Never carry more passengers than your craft specifies and follow all local speed limits. Lower your speed in congested areas.
- Know your waterways. Travel in waters that are suitable for your boat, and be aware of your and your boat's limitations.
- Allow right-of-way to sailboats, commercial vessels and fishing vessels at all times; stay to the right when approaching an oncoming craft; and be aware of any swimmers, surfers or skiers sharing the water.
- Keep U.S. Coast Guard approved Visual Distress Devices (i.e. pyrotechnic red flares, orange distress flags, electric distress lights) in a secure and easily accessible area on your boat.
- Designate one-third of your boat's fuel for your destination, one-third for your return and one-third for reserve.
- Maintain working safety gear on your boat, including a fire extinguisher, first aid kit, extra life jackets/PFDs, whistle, life ring and flashlight.
- Wear eye protection, a wet suit, footwear and gloves when operating any PWC.



Bathtubs & Hot Tubs

The bathroom is an extremely hazardous area of the home.

Approximately **300 Americans** die in their bathtubs each year from drowning, falls and electrocutions. Keep in mind that children can drown in as little as two inches of water. Use the following safety tips around the bathtub(s) in your home



- Start the bath with cold water before turning on the hot water. Turn off the hot water first after filling the tub to help reduce the threat of burns.
- Check the tub's water temperature thoroughly. A small child's skin is extremely sensitive and can burn more easily than an adult's.
- Keep the hot water heater temperature at or below 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Scalding water can cause major burns to small children and the elderly.
- Never leave infants unattended in or near the bathtub, even for just a few seconds.
- Keep a suctioned safety mat inside the tub and a large cloth rug directly against the outside of the tub to help prevent slips and falls.
- Never enter the bathtub in a tired, drowsy or drunken state.

Bathtubs & Hot Tubs

People all over the world enjoy hot tubs. Unfortunately, many of the injuries that occur in and around swimming pools can also occur with hot tubbing. Apply the same pool safety guidelines to hot tubs and spas, and remember the following important safety precautions:

- Never soak in hot tubs under the influence of alcohol.
- Limit the time you spend soaking in hot tubs, as high water temperatures can elevate body temperatures beyond safe limits for children, pregnant women, diabetics and heart patients.
- Make sure the electrical outlets near the hot tub are protected by ground fault circuit interrupters, which are designed to prevent electrical shock.
- Be careful around inlet and outlet grates and drains; drowning or serious injury can occur if hair becomes entrapped by suction.
- Keep anything carrying a live electrical current (i.e. hair dryers, cell phone, radio, etc.) far away from the water. Electrical shock or electrocution can occur if a live electrical current comes into contact with water.
- Never run or jump into hot tubs.
- Enclose hot tubs with self-closing, self-latching gates that open outward.



Resources

American Red Cross
National Headquarters
2025 E. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
202-303-5000
www.redcross.org

**The Association of
Pool & Spa Professionals**
2111 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-838-0083
www.apsp.org

**Boat Owner's Association
of the United States**
880 S. Prickett Street
Alexandria, VA 22304
1-800-336-2628
www.boatus.com

**National Marine
Manufacturers Association**
231 S. LaSelle Street Suite 2050
Chicago, IL 60604
312-946-6200
www.nmma.org

**National Swimming
Pool Foundation**
4775 Granby Circle
Colorado Springs, CO 80919
719-540-9119
www.nspf.org

**United States Army Corps of
Engineers Headquarters**
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20314
202-761-0011
www.usace.army.mil

**U.S. Coast Guard Boating
Safety Courses**
1-800-336-BOAT
boatus.com/courseline

**United States Coast Guard
Navigation Center**
7323 Telegraph Road
Alexandria, VA 20598
703-313-5900
www.navcen.uscg.gov

**United States
Lifesaving Association**
866-367-8752
www.usla.org

**United States Power
Squadrons National Secretary**
1504 Blue Ridge Road
Raleigh, NC 27607
919-821-0281
www.usps.org



What is the ATSPA?

The American Trauma Society, Pennsylvania Division is a non profit organization committed to preventing traumatic injuries and deaths through education.

We provide educational presentations and materials on a variety of trauma prevention topics. As a non profit, all presentations and materials are provided free of charge for any organization, school, business or community group in Pennsylvania.

Contact us today to learn more about our work.



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