

Be safe in the water

Not only is June the first month of the summer season, it's also National Safety Month. Millions of Americans will be staying cool and getting some exercise in their backyard pools or at the beach over the next few months. Therefore, it's important to practice water safety.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children ages 1 to 14 years, and the fifth leading cause for people of all ages. Follow these tips to protect yourself and your family this summer:

- If you can't swim, learn now. Have your children learn, too. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends swimming lessons for most children four years and older, and for children between one and four who are ready to learn to swim.
- When children are in and around the water, give them your undivided attention. Stay in arm's reach of small children. When there are several adults present while children are in the water, designate each one to be the supervisor for 15-minute intervals.
- Have children and any other inexperienced swimmers wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets. Water wings, noodles and inner tubes are meant to be toys. They are not meant to take the place of approved floatation devices.
- Teach young children basic safety tips. Instruct them to never go in or near the water without an adult present. Tell them not to play or swim near drains and suction outlets.
- Check pool drain covers regularly. Make sure they are securely in place and have no cracks. Replace flat drain covers with dome-shaped ones.
- Learn CPR and keep your skills updated. The American Red Cross and American Heart Association both offer instruction courses.
- Surround your pool with a fence at least four-feet high. Install lockable safety covers on your pool or spa. Remove ladders or steps when the pool isn't being used.
- To keep your pool clean and clear, maintain proper chemical levels, circulation and filtration. Test the chemical levels on a regular basis to minimize the risk of earaches, rashes and other medical issues.
- Look for rip currents in open water. Signs include choppy and foamy water, and water filled with debris moving in a path away from shore. If you happen to get caught in a rip current, swim parallel to shore. When you get free of the current, swim toward shore.
- Avoid alcohol before or during swimming or boating. Accident risks increase with alcohol use. Never drink alcohol while supervising children.

Here's to a healthy, safe and fun-filled summer!