

DATE: May 20, 2026

TO: Children's Division and Foster Care Case Management

FROM: Sara Smith, Children's Division Director

SUBJECT: **Water Safety and Prevention**

OVERVIEW:

As we approach warmer weather and increased time spent around water, we want to take a moment to emphasize the importance of water safety. Whether at pools, lakes, rivers or even at home, being aware and prepared can prevent accidents and save lives. Our mission is to keep children safe; one way we can remain centered on safety is by assessing risk factors during home visits and engaging families in discussions about ways to reduce risk. Having water safety conversations with parents and caregivers is one way to help build their protective capacities and keep children safe. As you make home visits this month and during the summer season, make it a point to discuss water safety with every family. Prevention steps and preparing for water activities can go a long way in keeping children safe around water.

The following information and resources are being provided to assist you in having water safety conversations with parents, foster families, relative caregivers, and your own family and friends.

Statistics – It can happen to anyone.

In the United States, drowning is the number one cause of death for children under 4 years old, and the second leading cause of death among children between the ages of 5 to 14 years of age. Approximately 900 children and adolescents die from unintentional drownings each year. That is an average of 3 drowning deaths per day.

In a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) study of drownings among children 4 years and under, *70% of the children were not expected to be at or in the pool*, yet they were found in the water and 46% of the children were last seen in the house before drowning.

Prevention – What can parents and caregivers do to keep children safe around water?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends several ways parents can help keep children safe around swimming pools and hot tubs—all year long—in your own backyard, your neighbor's, or on vacation:

- Assign an adult water watcher. His or her job is to watch all children swimming or playing in or NEAR water—such as on a backyard swing set—even if they know how to swim. This person should:

- not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol,
- put down his or her cell phone and avoid other activities,
- supervise even if there are lifeguards,
- switch off with another adult for breaks,
- know how to swim, get emergency help, and perform CPR.
- Ensure children wear a properly fitted, U.S. Coast Guard approved, [life jacket](#) when around or near open water. Life jackets should be put on children prior to children being able to access the pool or water.
- Pursue swimming lessons for children 4 years and older, and for children 1 to 4 years of age who are ready to learn how to swim.
- Know [CPR](#) and how to [get emergency help](#).
- Keep equipment approved by the U.S. Coast Guard, such as life preservers and life jackets at poolside.
- If a child is [missing](#), look for him or her in the pool or spa first, this is especially important if the child is prone to [wandering](#).
- Teach children water safety rules and make sure these are obeyed:
 - Never swim alone,
 - Never dive into water except when permitted by an adult who knows the depth of the water and who has checked for underwater objects, and
 - Always use a life jacket when on a boat, fishing, or playing in a river or stream.

Whether you are at home, or visiting somewhere, ensure swimming pools and other sources of standing water are inaccessible to children:

- Shut and lock doors or access to the outside. Ensure doors are self-closing/self-latching and that windows, and pet doors have lock guards.
- Install a fence around home pools that is at least four feet tall, non-climbable, and has a self-latching, self-closing gate. Gates should only open away from the pool. The latches should be higher than a child can reach – 54 inches from the bottom of the gate.
- For above-ground pools always keep children away from steps or ladders. When the pool is not in use, lock or remove the ladders to prevent access by children.
- Use automatic pool covers (motorized covers operated by a switch) that cover the entire pool so a child cannot slip under. Make sure there is no standing water on top of the pool cover. Be aware that floating solar covers are not safety covers.
- Use door and/or pool alarms to alert you if a door has been opened or something has fallen in the pool.
- After children are done swimming, secure the pool so they can't get back into it.
- Immediately drain buckets, baths and blow-up pools after each use.

Resources – Share, Share, Share!!!

For more information on Water Safety, visit these websites:

[Water Safety for Children with Special Health Care Needs - HealthyChildren.org](#)

[Water Safety for Teens - HealthyChildren.org](#)

[Pool Dangers and Drowning Prevention—When It's Not Swimming Time - HealthyChildren.org](#)

[Pool or Spa Submersion: Estimated Nonfatal Drowning Injuries and Reported Drownings, 2025 Report | CPSC.gov](#)

[Drowning Prevention | Children's Safety Network](#)

[Preventing Drowning | Drowning Prevention | CDC](#)

For questions or concerns, please contact:

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This Practice Alert remains effective unless the current policy has been rescinded or revised with contradictory guidance.

CHILD WELFARE MANUAL POLICY AND COLLATERAL DOCUMENTATION:

N/A