

# SAFETY GUIDE FOR HOME SWIMMING POOLS AND SPAS

Drowning takes the lives of more California toddlers than any other kind of accident. Children who manage to survive a “near drowning” often suffer permanent brain damage from lack of oxygen.



Children one to four years old are at greatest risk. They are very active and curious, and they learn new skills every day. One day they suddenly learn how to open the sliding door and wander from the house to the pool and spa area. A child may fall in and drown silently without calling out for help. The whole event can happen in just a minute or two. Most of these drownings take place at the homes of parents, relatives or neighbors.

Fortunately, you can prevent toddler drowning by combining these two methods:

- **ADULT SUPERVISION** and
- **SAFETY BARRIERS**

## Tips for Improving Adult Supervision

Supervision of children around water is not “normal” supervision, where we check on a child every couple of minutes. When around water, children must be kept in **direct sight at all times**. Children in water or next to water can drown immediately and silently, so there is no room for error.

- Never leave a young child alone in or around a pool, spa or wading pool, even for a few seconds.

- When young children are in or around the pool or spa, assign a “Water Watcher” to keep them in **DIRECT SIGHT**. Relieve the watcher every 20 minutes or so.
- Get into the habit of keeping doors and gates leading to water closed, even when using the pool or spa. Never prop doors or gates open.
- Be especially alert at the start and end of “planned” pool time for toddlers.
- If a child is missing, **ALWAYS** look first in the pool or spa. Seconds count!
- Keep rescue equipment (safety ring, long pole) and a cordless phone next to the pool or spa.

## Tips for Using Safety Barriers

A safety barrier helps prevent or slow a child from getting to the water.

A four-sided isolation fence is the best barrier as it completely surrounds the pool or spa. It is different from a property line or “perimeter” fence that keeps neighbor children from accessing your pool.

Isolation fencing separates the pool or spa from the house. Isolation fences are specially designed so that children cannot easily get over, under or through them.



- Make sure all fence gates and ladders leading to a pool or spa are self-closing and self-latching, with latches above the child’s reach.

Other barriers approved by California law for use with new or remodeled home pools include pool safety covers, removable mesh pool fencing, self-closing and latching devices on the home's doors, exit alarms on doors, swimming pool alarms, or any other barrier approved by local building officials. [See box below.]

- California law approves only certified safety covers. They must completely cover the pool or spa so children cannot fall into the water.
- All doors opening into pool or spa areas should close and latch automatically. Latch releases should be child-resistant or out of the reach of children.
- Doors and windows leading to the pool or spa area should be equipped with approved exit alarms (battery or wired to home electrical system) that make a loud sound throughout the house and have a temporary bypass switch located out of a child's reach.
- Pet doors should be kept locked when children are present in the home.
- Approved swimming pool alarms should be placed in the water to detect movement. CAUTION: These should not be used without some other physical barrier.

## Other Safety Tips

- Experts agree it is best to use more than one safety method to increase the likelihood of keeping a child away from danger.
- Parents, guardians and babysitters should learn cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and update their skills annually.

- Teach children how to dial 9-1-1.
- Restrict access to the pool or spa when it cannot be properly supervised. Doors and gates should be closed and locked.
- Keep things that children can climb on, like chairs, away from pool fences and gates.
- Have a professional regularly inspect your pool or spa for entrapment or entanglement hazards.
- Teach children how to swim when they are old enough. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends starting at 4 years old.

California's Swimming Pool Safety Act (Health and Safety Code §§115920-115929) requires at least one approved safety barrier be in place for all pools and spas built after January 1, 1998 and for any pools being remodeled.

Property owners with swimming pools constructed prior to 1998 should voluntarily install barriers around the pool that meets these standards.

Contact your local building department for details on how to meet this requirement.

If you have any comments or questions, please contact the CDPH Safe and Active Communities Branch at (916) 552-9800 or [sac@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:sac@cdph.ca.gov).

