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Prevent Needless Deaths

Facts on water safety for children

Drowning is now the leading cause of death for children under six years old in the Tampa Bay area. Over the last six years (2013-2018), 63 local children – enough to fill a school bus – have died from accidental drowning in our area.

In 2018 drowning surpassed unsafe sleep as the top cause of preventable child death among local children.

The facts on children and accidental drownings:

- Drowning can happen to any child, anywhere and anytime – not just pools or beaches. Lakes and ponds, along with household items, put kids at risk of drowning.
- Infants and toddlers can drown in as little as one inch of water, and it is especially hazardous when infants have not yet developed neck muscle control. Drowning hazards include pet water bowls, buckets, toilets, blow-up pools and bathtubs.
- Supervision is the best protection from drowning. Moving attention from a child – even for a few moments – can be dangerous. Accidental drownings happen in as little as 20 seconds.
- Young children often drown silently. The only sound is a small splash as the child enters the water.
- Two in three young kids who drowned in a pool were last seen in the house.

Water safety tips for parents and caregivers:

- *Stay alert.* Since children drown silently, they do not splash or call out for help like an adult would. This makes it even easier for a drowning child to go unnoticed, so stay alert.
- *Designate a “water watcher.”* Assign an adult to keep their eyes on the child at all times when they are near water. The watcher should avoid distraction, especially by phone calls, texting, reading or any other electronic devices.
- *Be within arm’s reach.* When infants and toddlers are in or around water, an adult should be within arm’s reach, and close enough to rescue the child if needed.
- *Never rely on flotation devices.* Flotation devices, such as water wings, inner tubes or even life vests should be used only in conjunction with close adult supervision.
- *Limit kids’ access to pools and hot tubs.* Install barriers and locks on your pool and be sure any pool your child visits has barriers and locks. All pools should have a pool fence with self-closing, self-latching locks that are out of reach from small children. Homes with pools should also have alarms on all doors and windows so you’re alerted if a child goes outside.
- *Lock your doors.* Pool barriers are important, but equally as important are working door locks. Make sure to lock exterior doors to prevent children from accessing pools, lakes, canals and ponds.
- *Teach your child to swim.* Many local organizations offer swim lessons for children.
- *Be aware of hidden hazards.* Empty bathtubs, buckets and inflatable pools when they are no longer in use. Keep pet bowls out of reach from children and bathroom doors closed.

Prevent Needless Deaths is an awareness campaign made possible by the Children’s Board of Hillsborough County and Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).