

Summer is a time of fun and relaxation for the whole family. It's critical for parents to recognize that many preventable tragedies occur during the summer months, particularly when children are near water. In this article, Susan Gauthier, Community Care Physicians Wellness Concierge, answers some frequently asked question from parents who are looking for ways to make sure that their children have an enjoyable but safe time outdoors.

Question: I've got three children, ages 3, 7 and 14. We're planning a summer vacation at the lake this year, what steps should I take to help protect them against drowning?

Answer: Many parents share your concerns about water safety. Regardless of how old your children are, you need to remain constantly alert whenever they are in or near bodies of water. There are important precautions that you can take to significantly reduce the chances of you or your children drowning or becoming near-drowning victims. These simple steps, recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, can help you and your children stay safe.

First, remember that whenever young children are swimming, playing, or bathing in water, an adult must **always** be watching them. This means that the supervising adult gives their complete and undivided attention to the children in and near the water. The supervising adult should not read, garden, play cards, talk on the phone, or do any other distracting activity while they are watching children.

Check the water depth before entering. The American Red Cross recommends 9 feet as a Check the water depth before entering. The American Red Cross recommends 9 feet as a minimum depth for diving or jumping.

It's easy for parents and children to have a false sense of security when they are near the water. This false sense of security can lead to tragedy by increasing the risk of drowning. **Do NOT use** air-filled swimming aids (such as "water wings") in place of life jackets or life preservers with children. These air-filled swimming aids can not do the same job as life jackets or life preservers.

Make it your business to learn how to swim. Parents and other caregivers can enroll themselves and/or their children aged 4 and older in swimming classes. Swimming classes are not recommended for children under age 4. Every adult should learn CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). This is particularly important for people who regularly participate in water recreation or who are pool owners.

From the earliest age, children must be taught never to swim alone or in an unsupervised area. Parents and caregivers should teach children to always swim with a buddy, and never without direct adult supervision. Children must know that they should never chew gum or eat while swimming, diving or playing in the water. Chewing gum during these times may result in choking.

Small children must be kept away from buckets or containers that hold liquid, particularly 5-gallon industrial drums. When household or outdoor chores are done, all buckets should be empty. Even small 'kiddie' pools can pose a danger to young children when

adults are not supervising the child's activities. Make sure to empty these small pools after each use.

Teenagers must be taught about the terrible risks of drinking alcohol and being near any body of water. Never drink alcohol before or during swimming, boating, water skiing, jet skiing or fishing.

For more information please contact Susan Gauthier, Community Care Physicians' Wellness Concierge (783-3110 extension 3347) at the Capital Region Health Park in Latham. Community Care Physicians Wellness Concierge is available to provide general health education information and to connect the public with health related services and programs across our community.