

Dry Drowning — Children At Risk

In 2005, fatal drowning was the second leading cause of death for children age 1 – 14. For every child who died from drowning, another 4 were treated in the emergency department for non-fatal, submersion injuries.

In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control reported almost 3600 cases of fatal, accidental drowning. Some of those deaths were noted to be dry drowning. Dry drowning can occur 1 to 24 hours after an incident in water.

With dry drowning, problems arise from a small amount of water that enters the lungs. When a child is pulled out of the water after an incident, he may look OK. But in the next 24 hours, that same child could die from dry drowning. Just because he did not drown in the water does not mean that he is out of danger.

If a child has an event or accident in water, parents should pay close attention to that child. Doctors tell parents to look for:

1. Difficulty breathing. The child could be short of breath or have continued coughing. Some may complain of chest pain.
2. Extreme tiredness. This

may be difficult for parents to monitor. Most children are tired after time spent playing in the sun and water.

3. Changes in behavior. This is also often difficult for parents to detect. You know your child. You often know if something is wrong.

These symptoms occur because the lungs fail to get oxygen to the brain.

If you think your child is at risk for dry drowning, call a doctor or go to a hospital emergency department. Dry drowning can be treated if caught early.



Help prevent drowning:

- Watch children in or near water at all times. Adults should focus their attention solely on the children. Reading a book or talking on the phone can distract a parent.
- Teach your child to swim. Enroll your children who are 4 years and older in a class. Swimming classes are not a means of drowning prevention in children under the age of 4.
- Have your child always swim with a buddy.
- Learn CPR.
- Put a life jacket on your child when boating or playing by water;
- Use a life jacket when swimming. Water wings, “noodles” and inner tubes are water toys and cannot prevent drowning.
- Avoid alcohol while watching children play in or out of water.

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.

1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week or log onto www.parenthelpline.org